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HISTORY of WAR



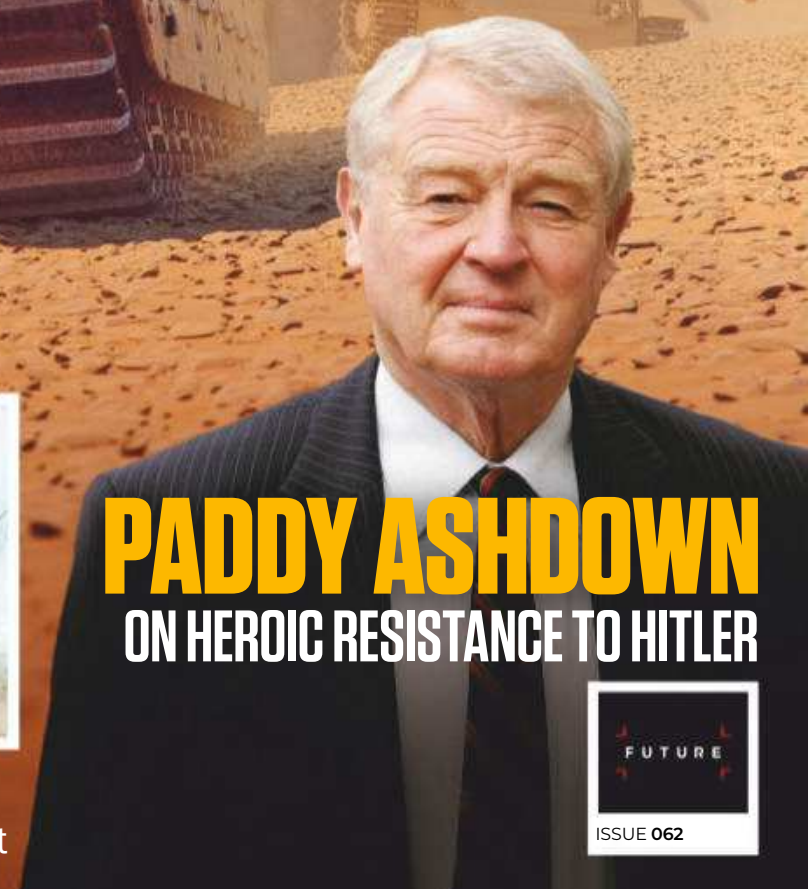
THE GREAT ESCAPE
VETERAN RECALLS REAL BREAKOUT

INSIDE THE DESERT RAT TACTICS THAT BROKE ROMMEL'S SIEGE

TORBRUK

WIN
HAYNES MANUALS
WORTH OVER
£115

PLUS:
Matilda II tank ☆
Jan Karol Chodkiewicz ☆
Postcards from the Front ☆



PADDY ASHDOWN
ON HEROIC RESISTANCE TO HITLER



US MARINE CORPS
Origins of the USA's elite troops



VC HERO PILOT
Valiant attack on airship bomber



SOMOSIERRA
Napoleon's genius Spanish conquest

FUTURE
ISSUE 062



KING & COUNTRY'S

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FW232

WHAT, you might ask, have a *Santa Claus* figure... a brilliant Belgian detective *Hercule Poirot*... an Italian dictator called *Benito Mussolini* and France's most famous son, *Napoleon Bonaparte* **ALL** have in common...?



LW066



WoD060

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Utilising caves and tunnels, Allied forces held out for eight months against determined Axis assaults on Tobruk

Welcome

Despite perhaps being better remembered for its catastrophic fall to Erwin Rommel in 1942, for months during 1941 the fortified port of Tobruk held out against a relentless Axis siege. The dogged defence of the British, Commonwealth and Allied garrison remains one of the great Allied victories in the North African theatre.

This issue explores how the garrison organised its steadfast defences to outwit the Germans, and held out until it was relieved during Operation Crusader. You can also find an incredible first-hand account from a British

artillery veteran who saw action throughout the entire siege. He reveals what daily life was really like inside one of WWII's most gruelling campaigns.



Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM GARNER

This issue, Tom spoke to Charles Clarke, who was captured after his Lancaster bomber was shot down, and witnessed the 'Great Escape' from Stalag Luft III POW camp. He also went on to survive the gruelling 'Long March' (p. 40).



ALEX ZAKRZEWSKI

In 1808, Napoleon was on the brink of completing his conquest of Spain – but standing between him and the capital was a narrow mountain path dotted with Spanish artillery. Starting on page 52 Alex recalls this famous French victory.



ANDY SAUNDERS

When exactly was the Battle of Britain? Author and historian Andy explains why this question may not be as simple as it seems. Over on page 80 he discusses how the official history has failed deserving veterans of the battle.



BREAKING ROMMEL'S SIEGE

26 The 241-day siege of Tobruk in 1941 saw Rommel's charge across the North African desert halted



Frontline

14 The US Marine Corps

The Marines have been fighting on the frontline since the USA's revolutionary beginnings

16 Marines in the Pacific

The Marines launched numerous amphibious landing during the island-hopping Pacific campaign

18 Belleau Wood 1918

Bitter hand-to-hand fighting on the Western Front earned the Marines a reputation for elite soldiering

20 Operation Dove Tail

This dress-rehearsal of an amphibious landing in 1942 was a complete disaster

22 Leaders & commanders

The US Marine Corps has been led by a series of legendary, larger-than-life characters

24 Units & tactics

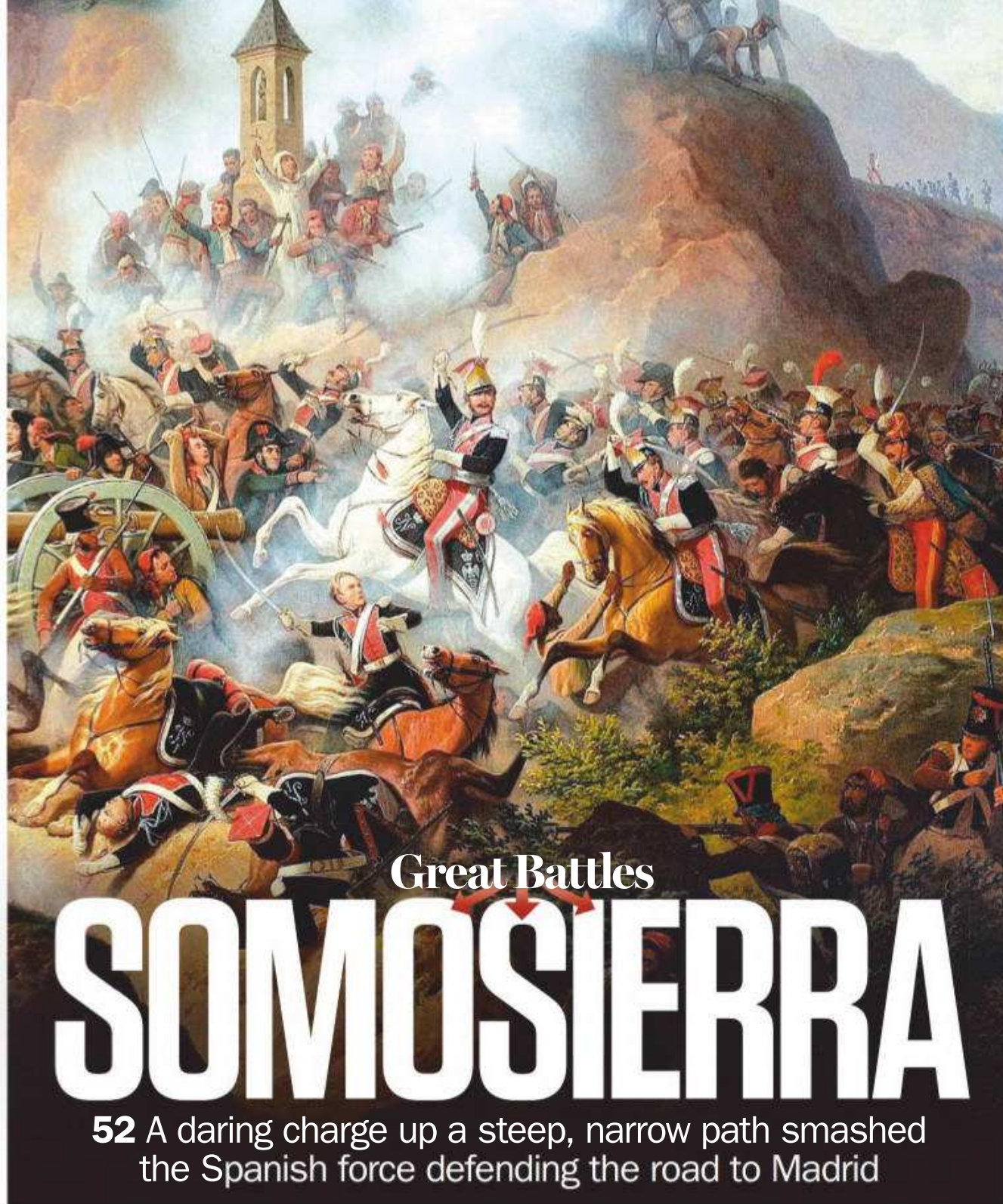
A wide range of personnel have operated under the banner of the US Marine Corps

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60 Never miss an issue, get **History Of War** before it's available in the shops and save a bundle while you're at it

40 After being shot down over Germany and becoming a POW, Charles Clarke witnessed the Great Escape

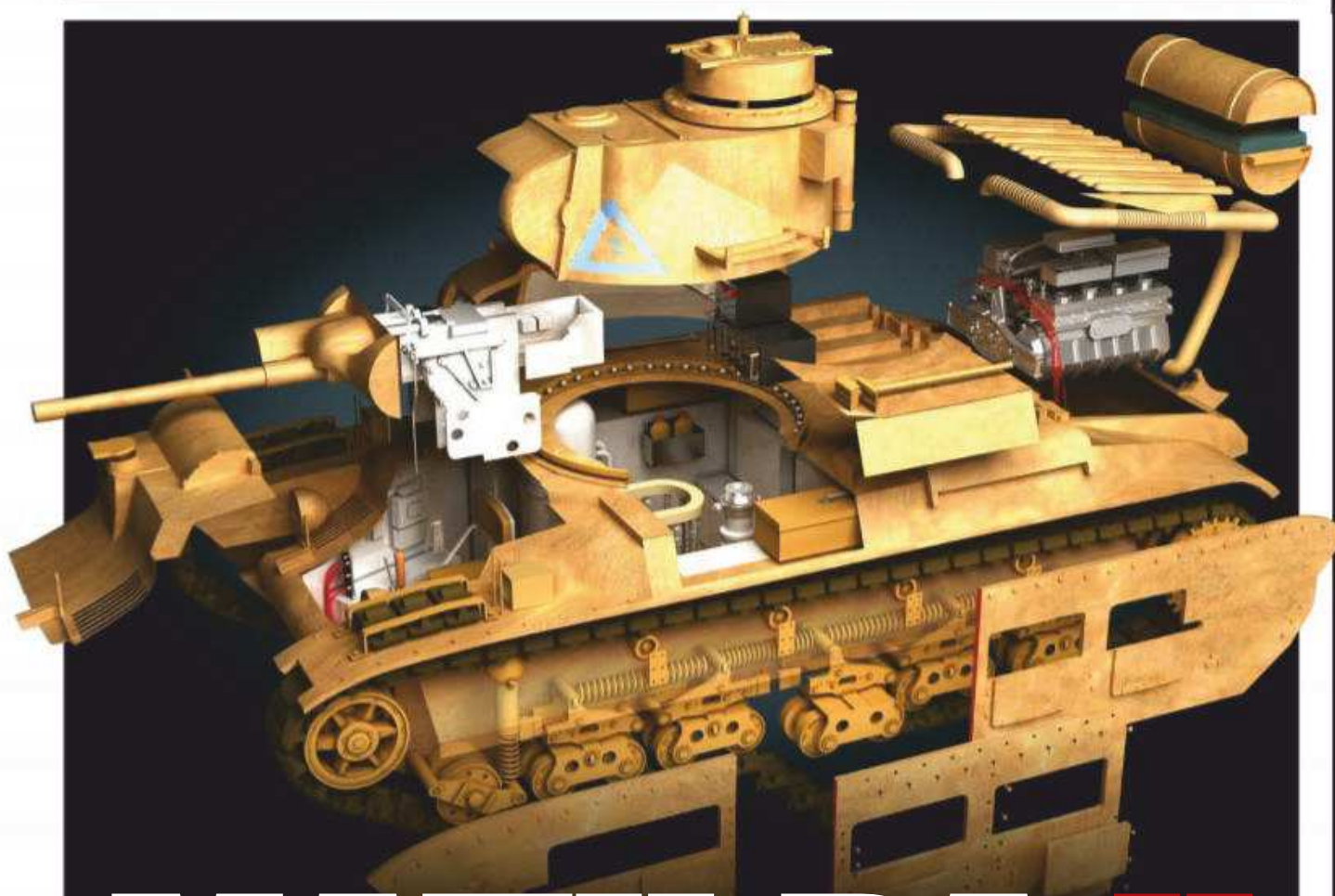
SURVIVING STALAG LUFT III



Great Battles

SOMOSIERRA

52 A daring charge up a steep, narrow path smashed the Spanish force defending the road to Madrid



MATILDA II

72 The Matilda prioritised armour protection over speed

- 06 WAR IN FOCUS**
Stunning imagery from throughout history
- 26 Breaking Rommel's siege**
Rommel's Axis forces were held outside this vital port city for eight months in 1941
- 36 Surviving the siege**
Dennis Middleton penned his memoirs of the desperate fighting at Tobruk
- 40 Surviving Stalag Luft III**
Charles Clarke survived the crackdown following the Great Escape and the infamous Long March
- 52 GREAT BATTLES**
Somosierra
A daring charge by Napoleon's Chevaux-légers Polonais cleared the road to Madrid
- 62 VICTORIA CROSS HEROES**
William Leefe Robinson
Robinson became a hero when he downed a German airship over England in 1916
- 66 Jan Karol Chodkiewicz**
This Polish-Lithuanian grand hetman led armies to victory in three major wars
- 72 OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK**
Matilda II
This British tank was designed for infantry support and initially took the North African campaign by storm

HISTORY
WAR

HOMEFRONT

- 80 OPINION**
When was the Battle of Britain?
Andy Saunders considers why the answer may not be straightforward
- 82 Nein! Standing Up To Hitler**
Paddy Ashdown discusses his new book
- 86 Museums & events**
Wilfred Owen's Shropshire, the NAM and restoring a D-Day landing craft
- 88 Reviews**
A round-up of the latest military titles
- 92 5 best books on...**
The 1941 siege of Tobruk
- 93 COMPETITION**
Haynes manual bundle
Five quality titles are up for grabs
- 94 Christmas gift guide**
A fantastic range of gift inspirations
- 98 ARTEFACT OF WAR**
WWI postcards
Silk postcards from the Western Front



WARⁱⁿ **FOCUS**

DECK THE TRENCH

Taken: 7 December 1969

Sergeant Buddy Bruek (left) and Sergeant First Class Ernesto Flores set up a Christmas tree in a spare mortar pit at the Duc Lap Special Forces Camp. Detachments from special forces outfits were based in the camp during the Vietnam War, as well as South Vietnamese forces.

The camp came under attack by People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops in August 1968.



WAR_{in}
FOCUS
A WATERY WRECK

Taken: 2 October 2007

A diver explores the wreckage of a Mitsubishi Zero, submerged off the coast of Kimbe Bay, Papua New Guinea. Despite decades spent on the seabed, the aircraft is in remarkable condition, with no external damage suggesting it was shot down. Although the pilot is missing, his plane's serial number indicates it was flown during the Battle of Cape Gloucester, 1943-44.







WARⁱⁿ FOCUS

KEEPING WATCH

Taken: c. July 1940

A month after the evacuation of Dunkirk, British personnel keep watch on the east coast of the UK, manning an Ordnance QF 2-pounder antitank gun. During 1940, military and civilians were mobilised to construct a robust defence against German invasion, including pillboxes and antitank stop lines throughout the south and southwest of England.





WARⁱⁿ **FOCUS**

PLAYTIME FOR HITLER

Taken: April 1939

Engineer and designer Ferdinand Porsche presents Adolf Hitler with a model car during celebrations for the führer's 50th birthday. Porsche also gifted Hitler a personalised Volkswagen Beetle for the occasion, which was declared a national holiday throughout Germany and was also observed by sympathisers and German communities abroad.

TIMELINE OF THE... US MARINE CORPS

The United States' expeditionary and amphibious force has been fighting on the frontline of the country's wars since its revolutionary beginnings

"MARINES PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE DURING THE PACIFIC CAMPAIGN, PARTICIPATING IN FIERCE FIGHTING AT BATTLES SUCH AS GUADALCANAL, IWO JIMA AND OKINAWA"

One of the most iconic photographs from World War II depicts six marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima



3-4 March 1776

BATTLE OF NASSAU

Founded on 10 November 1775, the Continental Marines soon see action in the Bahamas. Captain Samuel Nicholas leads 234 marines to capture a large British gunpowder supply at Fort Nassau. The British garrison surrenders within minutes, and Nicholas's marines also capture cannons and other military stores.

Continental sailors and marines land at New Providence Island in the Bahamas, 3 March 1776



27 April-13 May 1805

BATTLE OF DERNA

The Marines are dispatched to Libya to rescue the kidnapped crew of USS Philadelphia from Barbary pirates. After marching across hundreds of kilometres of desert, the Marines fight the first American land battle on foreign soil and win, securing protection for US shipping in the region.

Marines fighting in the Barbary Wars are known as 'Leathernecks' after the high collar they wear as protection from pirates' sabre cuts

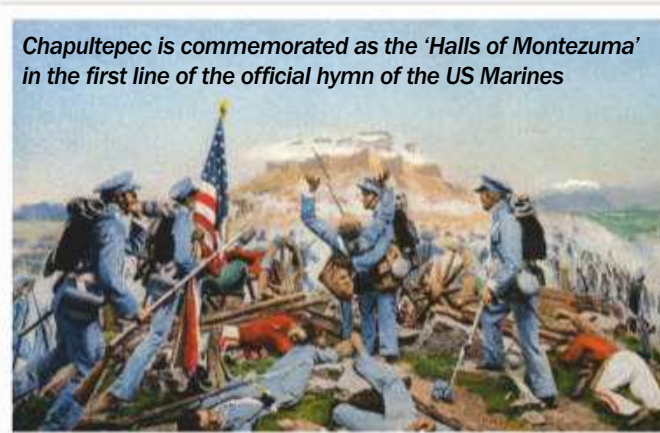


12-13 September 1847

BATTLE OF CHAPULTEPEC

400 Marines play a crucial role in the US victory in the Mexican-American War by capturing Chapultepec Castle. This engagement leads to the American capture and occupation of Mexico City.

Chapultepec is commemorated as the 'Halls of Montezuma' in the first line of the official hymn of the US Marines



BATTLE OF CHOSIN RESERVOIR

1st Marine Division is surrounded and outnumbered eight-to-one by the Chinese army during the Korean War. Cut off from air support and fighting in extremely cold conditions, the Marines nevertheless decimate ten Chinese infantry divisions before fighting their way back to the sea.

Marines watch Vought F4U Corsairs drop napalm on Chinese positions, 1950



WORLD WAR II

The corps is heavily expanded to almost 500,000 personnel and Marines play a central role during the Pacific Campaign, participating in fierce fighting at battles such as Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

BATTLE OF HUE

The outnumbered Marines fight an intense urban battle against North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces during the Vietnam War. The city of Hue is retaken street by street by the Marines, although enormous losses are incurred on both sides.

Below: Medics rush while trying to avoid gunfire to aid a wounded marine in Hue



1918

1941-45

27 November-13 December 1950

30 January-3 March 1968

1991-

WORLD WAR I

Marines distinguish themselves on the Western Front, particularly at Belleau Wood, while an aviation wing is also developed. The 1st Marine Aviation Force records air-to-air kills while Marine aircraft also hunt U-boats from the Azores.



US Marines pose as the 'First to Fight' in a publicity photograph, 1918



US marines conduct a dawn patrol in Nawa District, Afghanistan, 30 May 2010

THE GULF, AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

Marine divisions achieve success during the Gulf War and spend the Iraq War largely fighting in densely populated areas, particularly in Fallujah. The Marines spearhead the war in Afghanistan and they continue to fight the Taliban alongside Afghan forces.

Images: Getty

MARINES IN THE PACIFIC

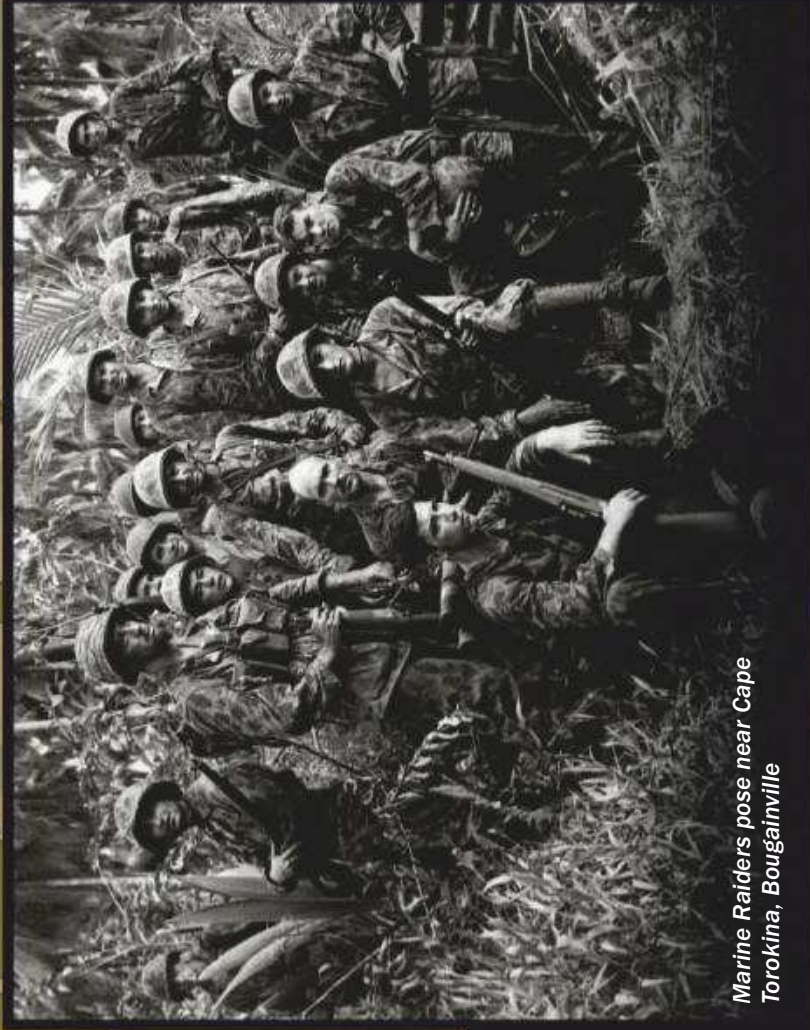
The amphibious soldiers launched repeated landings during the USA's extremely bloody island-hopping battles against the Japanese in WWII

1 GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

7 AUGUST 1942 - 9 FEBRUARY 1943

GUADALCANAL, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

During the Allies' first major offensive in the Pacific, 6,000 marines land on Guadalcanal and seize the Japanese airfield. Both sides pour in reinforcements, which results in bitter jungle fighting. The Japanese are unable to overwhelm the Americans' defensive perimeter to retake the airfield.



Marine Raiders pose near Cape Torokina, Bougainville

2 BOUGAINVILLE CAMPAIGN

1 NOVEMBER 1943 - 21 AUGUST 1945

BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

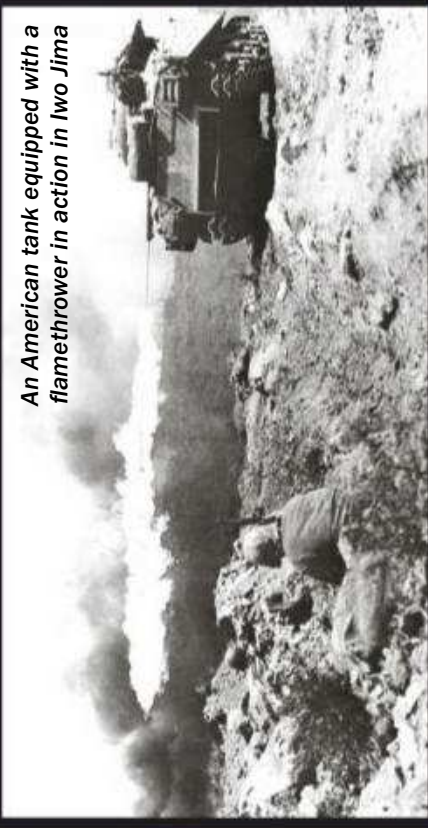
The Allies invade Bougainville in two stages, with the Americans invading the island before Anzac troops mop up Japanese resistance. I Marine Amphibious Corps (including 3rd Marine Division) successfully secures Bougainville's perimeter in difficult conditions.

7 BATTLE OF IWO JIMA

19 FEBRUARY - 26 MARCH 1945

IWO JIMA, VOLCANO ISLANDS

Although it is a tiny island, Iwo Jima is within fighter aircraft range of Tokyo. 60,000 marines are committed to an astonishingly ferocious battle where 26,000 American casualties outstrip the 18,000 Japanese dead. Iwo Jima becomes an iconic US victory, but its necessity and significance remains disputed.



An American tank equipped with a flamethrower in action in Iwo Jima

“THE AIRSTRIP IS TAKEN AFTER FIERCE COMBAT, BUT THE MARINES SUFFER OVER 3,000 CASUALTIES. ONLY 17 JAPANESE SOLDIERS SURVIVE THE BATTLE”

3 BATTLE OF TARAWA

20-23 NOVEMBER 1943

BETIO, TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS

2nd Marine Division is tasked with dislodging 4,700 Japanese troops from an airstrip on Betio. US assault boats land at low tide, which exposes the Americans to merciless gunfire. The airstrip is taken after fierce combat, but the Marines suffer over 3,000 casualties. Only 17 Japanese soldiers survive the battle.

4 FIRST BATTLE OF GUAM

8-10 DECEMBER 1941

GUAM, MARIANA ISLANDS

5 BATTLE OF ENIWETOK

17-23 FEBRUARY 1944

ENIWETOK ATOLL, MARSHALL ISLANDS

6 BATTLE OF WAKE ISLAND

8-23 DECEMBER 1941

WAKE ISLAND, UNITED STATES MINOR OUTLYING ISLANDS

7 BATTLE OF KWAJALEIN

31 JANUARY-3 FEBRUARY 1944

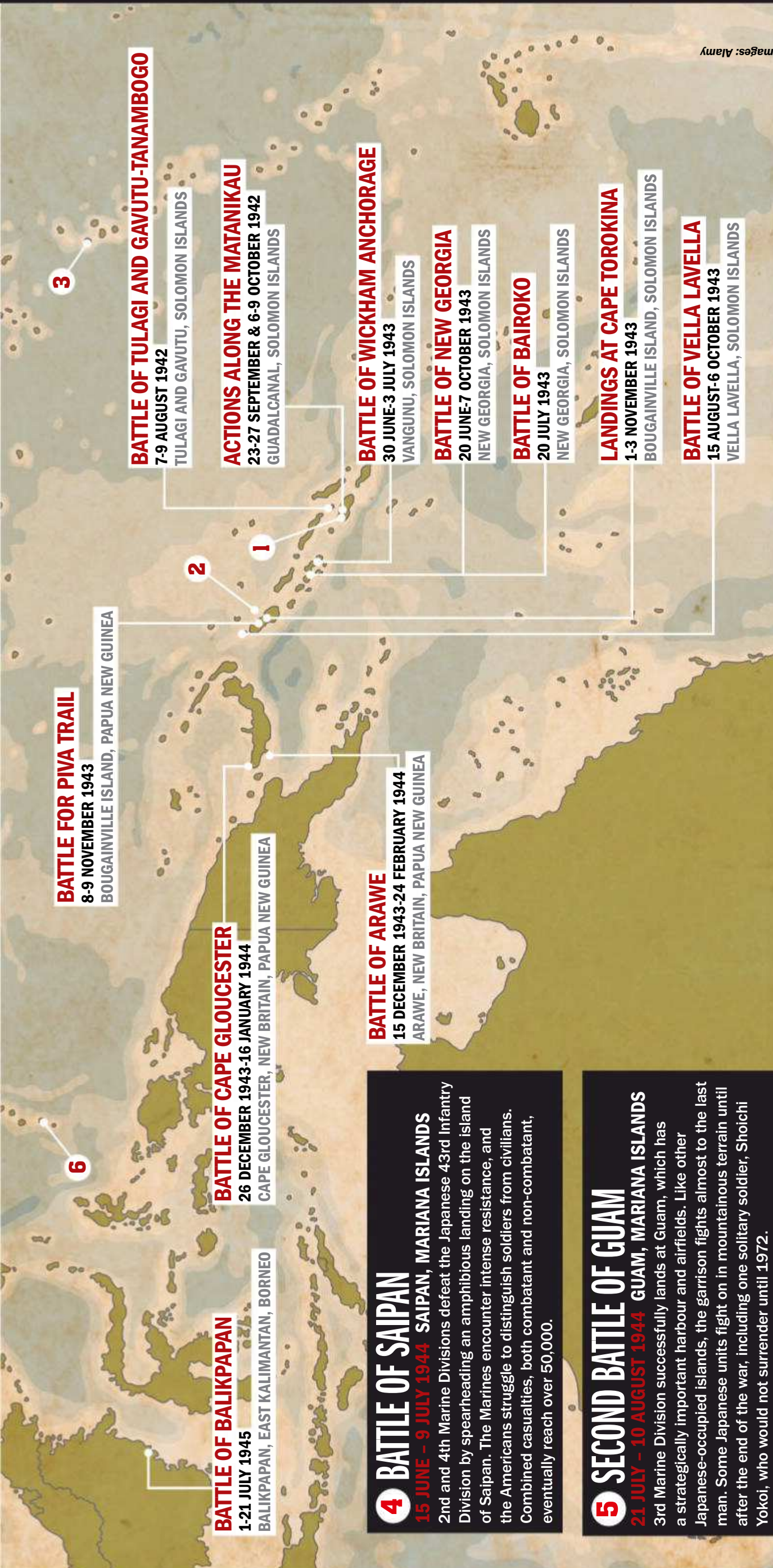
KWAJALEIN ATOLL, MARSHALL ISLANDS

8 RAID ON MAKIN ISLAND

17-18 AUGUST 1942

BUTARITARI, GILBERT ISLANDS





Images: Alamy

6
BATTLE FOR PIVA TRAIL
 8-9 NOVEMBER 1943
 BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND, PAPIUA NEW GUINEA

2
BATTLE OF CAPE GLOUCESTER
 26 DECEMBER 1943-16 JANUARY 1944
 CAPE GLOUCESTER, NEW BRITAIN, PAPIUA NEW GUINEA

1
BATTLE OF ARAWA
 15 DECEMBER 1943-24 FEBRUARY 1944
 ARAWA, NEW BRITAIN, PAPIUA NEW GUINEA

3
BATTLE OF BALIKPAPAN
 1-21 JULY 1945
 BALIKPAPAN, EAST KALIMANTAN, BORNEO

4 **BATTLE OF SAIPAN**
15 JUNE - 9 JULY 1944 SAIPAN, MARIANA ISLANDS
 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions defeat the Japanese 43rd Infantry Division by spearheading an amphibious landing on the island of Saipan. The Marines encounter intense resistance, and the Americans struggle to distinguish soldiers from civilians. Combined casualties, both combatant and non-combatant, eventually reach over 50,000.

5 **SECOND BATTLE OF GUAM**
21 JULY - 10 AUGUST 1944 GUAM, MARIANA ISLANDS
 3rd Marine Division successfully lands at Guam, which has a strategically important harbour and airfields. Like other Japanese-occupied islands, the garrison fights almost to the last man. Some Japanese units fight on in mountainous terrain until after the end of the war, including one solitary soldier, Shoichi Yokoi, who would not surrender until 1972.



Marine Captains Paul O'Neal (left) and Milton Thompson plant the American flag eight minutes after US forces land on Guam

6 **BATTLE OF PELELIU**
15 SEPTEMBER - 27 NOVEMBER 1944
 PELELIU, PALAU ISLANDS
 1st Marine Division commander Major General William Rupertus predicts that a Japanese airstrip on the small coral island of Peleliu will be secured in four days. It takes over two months to overcome Japanese defensive tactics and fortifications.

“2,792 MARINES ARE KILLED IN A BATTLE THAT CLAIMS 48,000 AMERICAN CASUALTIES AND A STAGGERING 77,000-110,000 JAPANESE SOLDIERS KILLED ALONG WITH 40,000-150,000 CIVILIANS”

3
BATTLE OF TULAGI AND GAVUTU-TANAMBOGO
 7-9 AUGUST 1942
 TULAGI AND GAVUTU, SOLOMON ISLANDS

2
ACTIONS ALONG THE MATANIKAU
 23-27 SEPTEMBER & 6-9 OCTOBER 1942
 GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

1
BATTLE OF WICKHAM ANCHORAGE
 30 JUNE-3 JULY 1943
 VANGUNU, SOLOMON ISLANDS

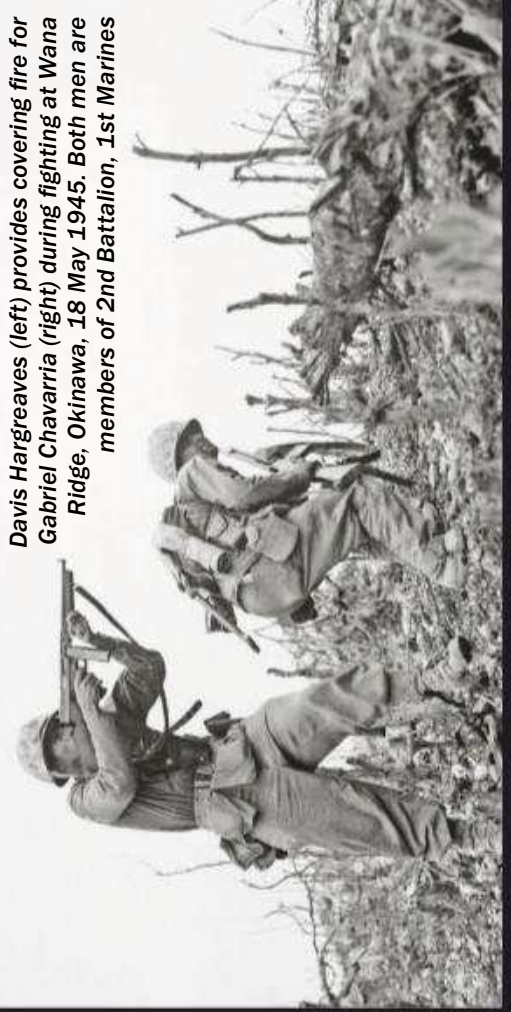
2
BATTLE OF NEW GEORGIA
 20 JUNE-7 OCTOBER 1943
 NEW GEORGIA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

3
BATTLE OF BAIROKO
 20 JULY 1943
 NEW GEORGIA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

4
LANDINGS AT CAPE TOROKINA
 1-3 NOVEMBER 1943
 BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND, SOLOMON ISLANDS

5
BATTLE OF VELLA LAVELLA
 15 AUGUST-6 OCTOBER 1943
 VELLA LAVELLA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

8 **BATTLE OF OKINAWA**
1 APRIL - 22 JUNE 1945 OKINAWA, RYUKYU ISLANDS, JAPAN
 1st, 2nd and 6th Marine Divisions fight at an apocalyptic engagement known as the 'Typhoon of Steel'. 2,792 Marines are killed in a battle that claims 48,000 American casualties and a staggering 77,000-110,000 Japanese soldiers killed, along with 40,000-150,000 civilians.



Davis Hargreaves (left) provides covering fire for Gabriel Chavarría (right) during fighting at Wana Ridge, Okinawa, 18 May 1945. Both men are members of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines

Frontline

F A M O U S B A T T L E
BELLEAU WOOD 1918

The Marines gained an international reputation for elite soldiering at this relatively small but savage engagement during WWI

“COME ON, YOU SONS OF BITCHES, DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?” THIS BULLISH ATTITUDE SET THE TONE FOR THE BATTLE, WHICH DESCENDED INTO CARNAGE”

Belleau Wood was characterised by the grim hand-to-hand fighting between the US Marines and German troops

By May 1918, American soldiers had only played a supporting role for the Allies on the Western Front. Part of the reason for this slow progress was General John J. Pershing's reluctance to deploy US regiments into British or French armies. As commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), Pershing was determined to assemble an independent army of his own.

The AEF's slow but increasing numerical strength was critical for the Allies. Thousands of German soldiers were being transferred from the Eastern Front to the west, and they had launched the huge Spring Offensive to end the war. Part of the German advance stalled when Pershing finally deployed the US 1st Division at Cantigny. This operation was successful and demonstrated that American troops could fight.

However, at the Third Battle of the Aisne, the Germans reached the north bank of the Marne River, only 95 kilometres (59 miles) from Paris. The strategic situation for the Allies was serious, and the US 2nd and 3rd Divisions were ordered into the area. The 3rd Division secured a key bridgehead at Château-Thierry while the 2nd Division was deployed to a forested area to the northwest: Belleau Wood.

2nd Division was then a fresh unit and included a Marine brigade of 10,000 men. The Marines' task was to capture Belleau Wood, an area of woodland that was 1.6 kilometres (one mile) long and 0.8 kilometres (0.5 miles) wide. It was occupied by elements of five German divisions that had paused during their offensive. Machine gunners took up defensive positions in holes or behind rocks and were protected by the dense undergrowth. For the Marines this would be a completely new way of fighting. Their battle-weary French allies attempted to advise them to retreat, but Captain Lloyd Williams responded, "Retreat, Hell! We just got here." He was killed nine days later.

On 6 June 1918, the order came for the Marines to lead a counterattack into Belleau Wood. At 5pm, the advance began and Colonel Albertus W. Catlin observed, "My

Chicago Tribune reporter Floyd Gibbons was severely wounded during the battle but he popularised the Marines' courage and was awarded the French Croix de Guerre

hands were clenched as I watched. They [the Marines] might be wiped out... but they would never break." Two historians later wrote that as the Marines advanced they "left behind 14 decades of small-scale skirmishes with insurgents and pirates... and entered the industrialised world of massive firepower and wholesale slaughter."

They walked in exposed rank formations towards the wood but were gunned down. By nightfall, 222 were dead and over 850 were wounded. Nevertheless, their fighting spirit soon became evident when First Sergeant Dan Daly urged his company forward with the words, "Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?" This bullish attitude set the tone for the battle, which descended into carnage.

"A perfect hornets' nest"

The Marines threw themselves into the fray, day after day, and they made painful but steady progress. One battalion began the gradual American success but as Catlin, who was shot through the chest, recalled, "The minute they got into the woods our boys found themselves in a perfect hornets' nest of gunners, grenadiers and riflemen. There were machine gun nests everywhere – on every hillock, every ravine... and every gun was trained on the Marines."

Shorter-range weapons like bayonets and 'toad-stickers' – 20-centimetre (eight-inch) triangular blades set on knuckle handles – soon replaced guns and grenades. Marines such as Private Edward Cary said of the Germans, "They are yellow and will not fight like men", but the widespread close combat and the fact that the Germans counterattacked the Americans nine times between 6-15 June speaks volumes for their own battlefield courage.

The battle's horror gained a further ugliness when the Germans deployed mustard gas on 10 June, but the engagement raged on. The wood was not cleared of German soldiers until 26 June. 4,000 Marine casualties had secured this bloody American victory, of whom around 1,000 were killed.

The Marines had demonstrated a powerful display of their fighting prowess, and the battle elevated their elite status in the US armed forces. Many regarded Belleau Wood as a game-changer in America's military reputation and some even believed that it changed the course of the war. As Robert Lee Bullard, commander of the US 1st Division, stated, "The Marines didn't win the war here. But they saved the Allies from defeat."

A soldier makes his way through debris in Belleau Wood after the battle

DEVIL DOGS

THE MARINES' NICKNAME REPUTEDLY ORIGINATED AT BELLEAU WOOD, BUT ITS TRUE ORIGINS ARE UNCERTAIN

US Marines have several nicknames, such as 'Leathernecks' or 'Jarheads', but none is more famous than 'Devil Dogs'. As is common for many traditions in military units, the nickname is shrouded in legend, but the moniker purports to originate from Belleau Wood.

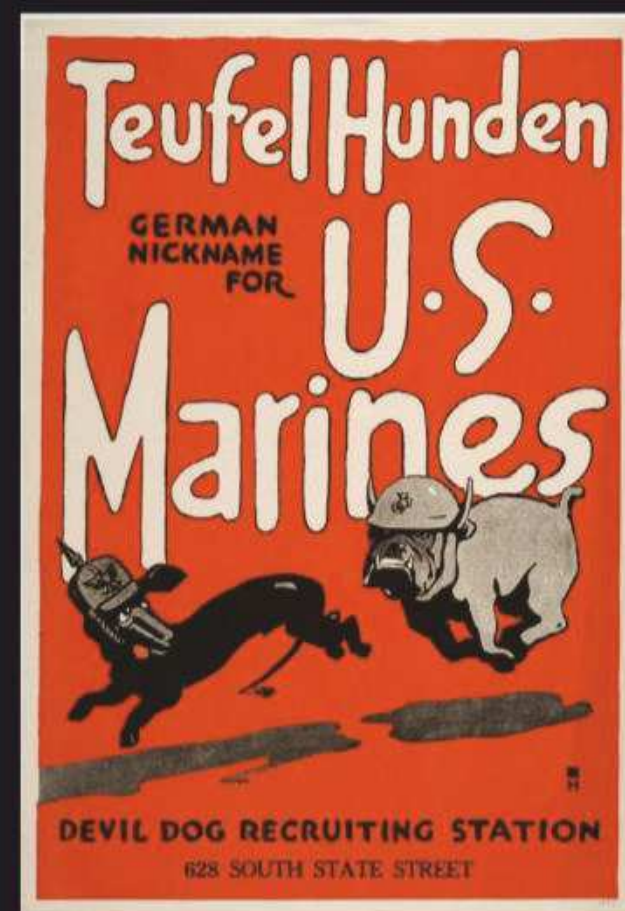
The most popular theory is that German officers referred to the Marines in their battlefield reports as "Teufelshunde" ("Devil Dogs"). One military magazine reported two months before the battle that the Germans were already calling the Marines "teufel hunden", but this is not linguistically correct and it was likely coined by an American. Indeed, there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that it was the Americans themselves who coined the nickname.

Much of the fame surrounding Belleau Wood was due to newspaper reports from Floyd Gibbons, who was a correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*. Gibbons lost an eye during the battle, and his headlines made a great impression on the American public. In one report he singled out a brave gunnery sergeant and referred to him as "Devil Dog Dan", which might have contributed to the nickname sticking, given Gibbons's popularity.

Consequently, the German origins are not supported by facts, but the nickname has stuck for 100 years and it is considered a title of honour. In tribute to the 'Devil Dogs', the official mascot for the US Marines today is a bulldog.

"THE NICKNAME HAS STUCK FOR 100 YEARS"

This poster from 1918 after the Battle of Belleau Wood directly appealed for volunteers to enlist at a "Devil Dog Recruiting Station"



OPERATION DOVETAIL

With amphibious assaults in the Solomon Islands just days away, the corps staged a dress rehearsal on a small island in Fiji. The result was a disaster

Following the Battle of Midway (4-7 June 1942), American thoughts turned to offensive operations in the Pacific. Although such a shift in philosophy sounds simple, it was in fact far from it. Any major offensive involving the US Navy would be its first in half a century.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff nevertheless put together a "Joint Directive for Offensive Operations in the South-west Pacific Area" on 2 July, identifying an invasion of Japanese-held territory in the Solomon Islands as the first phase.

The USA's amphibious warfare doctrine had been laid down in a 1938 paper, but training was patchy and nobody had any experience of the real thing. The Marine Corps would be providing the troops for the assaults, but they were inexperienced. The 1st Marine Division, selected for the job, had only been formed the previous year and most of its regiments had received no amphibious landing training whatsoever. The obvious solution was to stage a rehearsal for the landings that would take place on Guadalcanal, Tulagi and Gavutu. The problem was, those landings were scheduled to take place in August. There was precious little time available for training.

Under severe time pressure, Fiji was selected as a suitable training ground, with the island of Koro chosen as the landing site. Three US Marine officers inspected the proposed rehearsal zone and reported that it was "a most unpromising and unsuitable area", but they were overruled by Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, who did not think there was time to scout for an alternative.

Two landings were planned, on 28 and 30 July, with extraction to take place on the days following each landing. Three beaches were designated to represent the landing grounds at Guadalcanal, Tulagi and Gavutu, and a total of 75 naval vessels would be used, along with 66 landing boats. During the second landing there would be live naval fire support and air strikes to add realism.

Marines storm ashore at Guadalcanal. The dress rehearsal had not run nearly as smoothly



Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner and Major General Alexander Vandegrift look over plans for the landings on Guadalcanal

"DOVETAIL WAS QUIETLY EXPUNGED FROM THE OFFICIAL HISTORIES OF BOTH THE MARINE CORPS AND THE US NAVY"

Things went badly from the start. Loading the landing boats took longer than expected, and the first wave set off for the beaches 90 minutes behind schedule. Each boat carried 36 marines, with each man hauling a 30-kilogram (66-pound) pack, plus weapons and ammunition. Most of the boats, however, did not have front ramps, so the men would need to exit by clambering over the sides.

From a starting point over three kilometres (1.8 miles) from the beaches, and with a top speed of 16 kilometres per hour (ten miles per hour), the landing boats started their journeys.

It was then that the most serious deficiency in the planning of the rehearsal came to light. The original inspection of the island had taken place at high tide. It was now low tide, and as the boats got within 80 metres (87 yards) of the beach, coral became clearly visible in the water. Several boats hit the reef, damaging their propellers. Many other commanders decided it was too risky to proceed (the same craft would be needed for the landings on the Solomon Islands in just a few days) and ordered their marines over the side to wade ashore. Many of these marines found the water to be above head height and had to clamber back on board.

Following the chaos, the second day's landings were cancelled. The boats would simply approach the reef, then turn round and return to their ships. The live naval fire and air strikes, however, would go ahead as planned.

In the confusion, some landing boat commanders did not learn about the change of plan and took their men all the way to the beach. To make matters worse, a change in the timings of the naval bombardment was also missed by many, with the result that marines were on the beach just minutes before the bombardment was due to start. Miraculously, most of the men were safely extracted in time, but some had to take cover when the shells began to fall.

After the shambolic rehearsal, the fleet set sail for the Solomon Islands, leaving behind three marines who had somehow become lost on the island. Rejoining their unit weeks later, they were spared a court-martial. It would have been unfair for them to have been the only ones punished after such a catalogue of incompetence.

Operation Dovetail was quietly expunged from the official histories of both the Marine Corps and the US Navy, barely rating a mention in either. The US Marine Corps general in charge, A.A. Vandegrift, summed up the debacle neatly when he commented in his autobiography, "I shuddered to think what would happen if those beaches turned out to have been defended in strength."

images: Getty





CROMWELL TANK

MODEL MILITARY VEHICLES TREMENDOUS TANKS



CHALLENGER TANK SPECIFICATIONS

4	11.5 m	2.49 m
4.2 m	62.5T kg	59 km/h
450 km	1200 hp	120 mm
Perkins CV-12 V12 Diesel 26 litre		

Dominating the battlefield for 100 years, the tank was initially designed to break the stalemate of trench warfare and provide infantry units with a mobile, armoured base of fire that would give them a significant tactical advantage. Since that time, the tank has developed into an essential component of any integrated military force, whilst always challenging designers to find new ways of combining effective fire-power with greater speed and mobility – in the world of tank warfare, bigger is not always better.

First introduced by the British during the Battle of the Somme on 15 September 1916, the tank was developed under the utmost secrecy for fear of alerting the Germans to these decisive new weapons. Originally known as

Landships, workers involved in their production were told that the vehicles were nothing more than mobile water tanks for use in the desert war. As military planners looked for a suitable code word for the new machines, the word tank was adopted.

As the tank developed, it would become a crucial component of German Blitzkrieg during WWII, as they perfected the use of fast moving armoured vehicles to back up infantry assaults, following devastating aerial bombardment. Today's tanks can trace their lineage back to the first British Mark I machines of the Somme Offensive and will still be found at the spearhead of any ground based military operation.

Airfix kits allow you to recreate hundreds of different iconic aircraft, tank and car scale models in the comfort of your own home. Airfix produce a wide variety of tanks and military vehicles in a variety of different scales and schemes. Within the Airfix range, alongside the classic kits, there is a Cromwell MkIV Tank Starter Set which contains glue, paintbrush and 4 acrylic paints, everything you need to create a stunning 1:76 scale model.

The Battlefront Gift Set contains everything you need to build a complete diorama, including a Sherman and Tiger Tank, British and German infantry and a diorama base. Along with all the paint, glues and brushes required.

A55109 CROMWELL MKIV TANK STARTER SET 1:76



A01303 SHERMAN M4A2 TANK 1:76



A50009 BATTLEFRONT GIFT SET 1:76



LEADERS & COMMANDERS

History's pages are filled with larger-than-life characters who added their legends to the story of the Marine Corps

EVANS CARLSON 1896-1947 A DECORATED HERO WHO RAN AWAY FROM HOME AGED 14

Carlson worked his way up through the ranks twice, starting in both the US Army and then the Marines as a private, before earning commissions as a second lieutenant in each branch. It was with the Marines that he earned his first medal for gallantry, the Navy Cross. Tours of duty in China had already given him an insight into different philosophies of military hierarchies, which he put to good use when helping to set up the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion. Commanding the unit as a lieutenant colonel, he favoured a more egalitarian leadership style than was

traditional at the time, and the battalion became known as 'Carlson's Raiders'. It operated with great effectiveness during World War II, most notably in the diversionary raid on Makin Island in August 1942, during which Carlson won his second Navy Cross (he earned a third at Guadalcanal). Although it may just be a colourful myth, Carlson is also believed to have created the term 'gung ho', referring to the team-oriented style of the Marines.

Carlson utilised a democratic leadership style and used the term 'gung ho' taken from the Chinese 'kung ho', meaning 'work together'



The Marine Corps might not have remained an independent branch of the US armed forces if it were not for Henderson

ARCHIBALD HENDERSON 1783-1859

THE GRAND OLD MAN OF THE CORPS

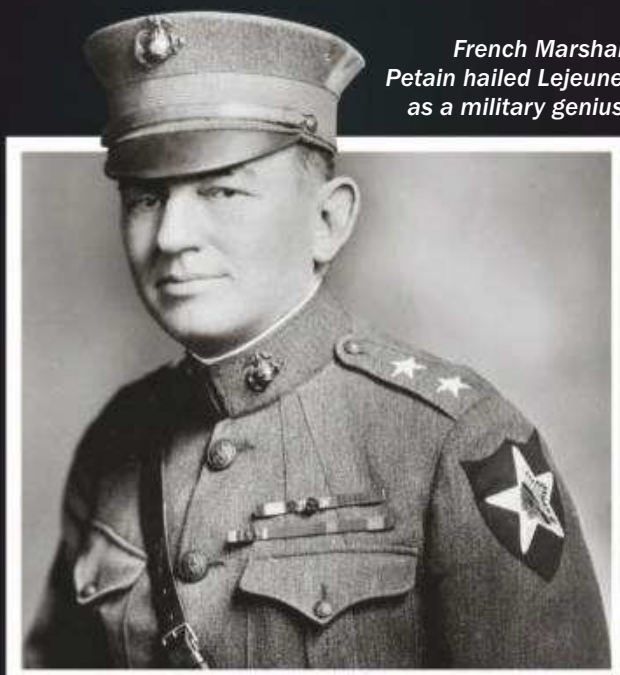
The longest-serving commandant of the Marines, Henderson held the top job from 1820 until his death in 1859, and he totalled an incredible 53 years of service with the Marines. First joining the corps as a second lieutenant in 1806, at the age of 18 he distinguished himself in action and was a captain by 1811. He was promoted to commandant on 17 October 1820, as a 37-year-old lieutenant colonel.

As well as his bravery in battle, Henderson also successfully fended off an unexpected challenge when President Andrew Jackson briefly considered making the Marine Corps part of the regular United States Army. Henderson saw action against Native American tribes in Florida and Georgia and in the Mexican-American War.

“COMMANDING THE UNIT AS A LIEUTENANT COLONEL, HE FAVOURED A MORE EGALITARIAN LEADERSHIP STYLE THAN WAS TRADITIONAL AT THE TIME, AND THE BATTALION BECAME KNOWN AS ‘CARLSON’S RAIDERS’”

JOHN ARCHER LEJEUNE
 1867-1942
 THE 'GREATEST OF ALL LEATHERNECKS'

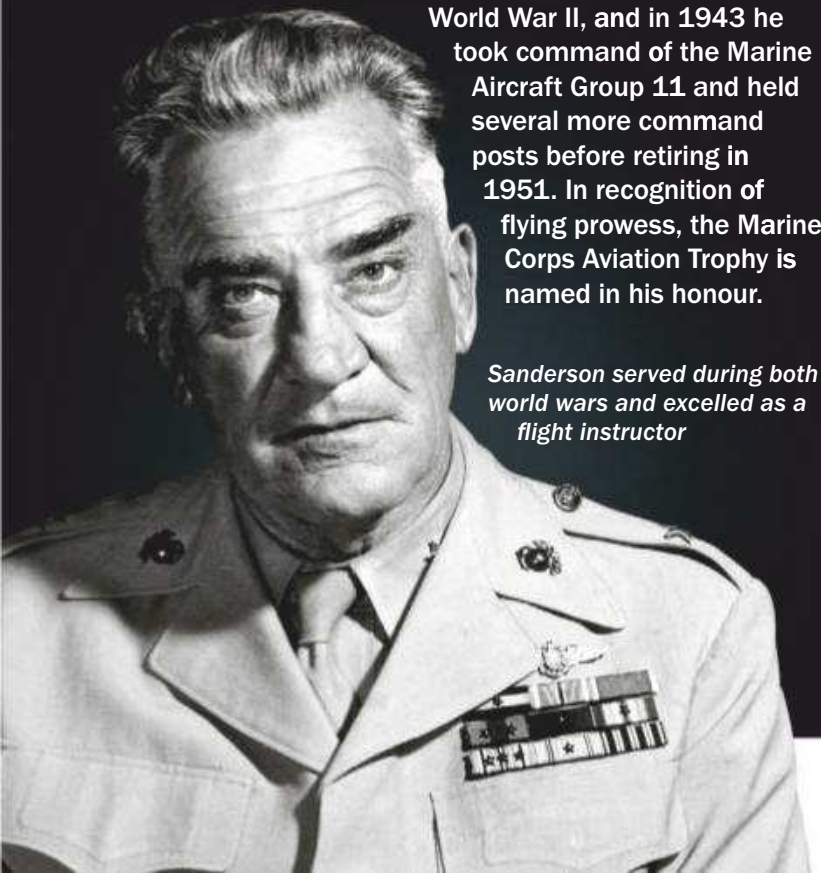
Having first joined the US Navy after graduating from the Naval Academy in 1888, Lejeune transferred to the Marine Corps two years later and reached the rank of captain by 1899. He continued to climb through the ranks and was a brigadier general by 1916, and reached major general after arriving in France towards the end of World War I. By the time hostilities ceased he was in command of the US Army 2nd Division, only the second Marine general to command an army division. He emphasised the importance of accurate artillery to support infantry advances and the need for mutual trust between different branches of the armed forces. On 1 July 1920 he became the 13th commandant of the Marine Corps.



French Marshal Petain hailed Lejeune as a military genius

LAWSON H.M. SANDERSON
 1895-1973
 THE INVENTOR OF DIVE BOMBING

The university-educated Sanderson joined the Marines in 1917 and quickly decided that aviation was his passion. During fighting with bandits in Haiti in 1919, Sanderson developed a technique for bombing ground targets that he called "glide bombing", but which became the basis for the standard dive-bombing method. His love of flying extended to air races in the 1920s. Sanderson later received the Legion of Merit for operations in the Guadalcanal campaign during World War II, and in 1943 he took command of the Marine Aircraft Group 11 and held several more command posts before retiring in 1951. In recognition of flying prowess, the Marine Corps Aviation Trophy is named in his honour.



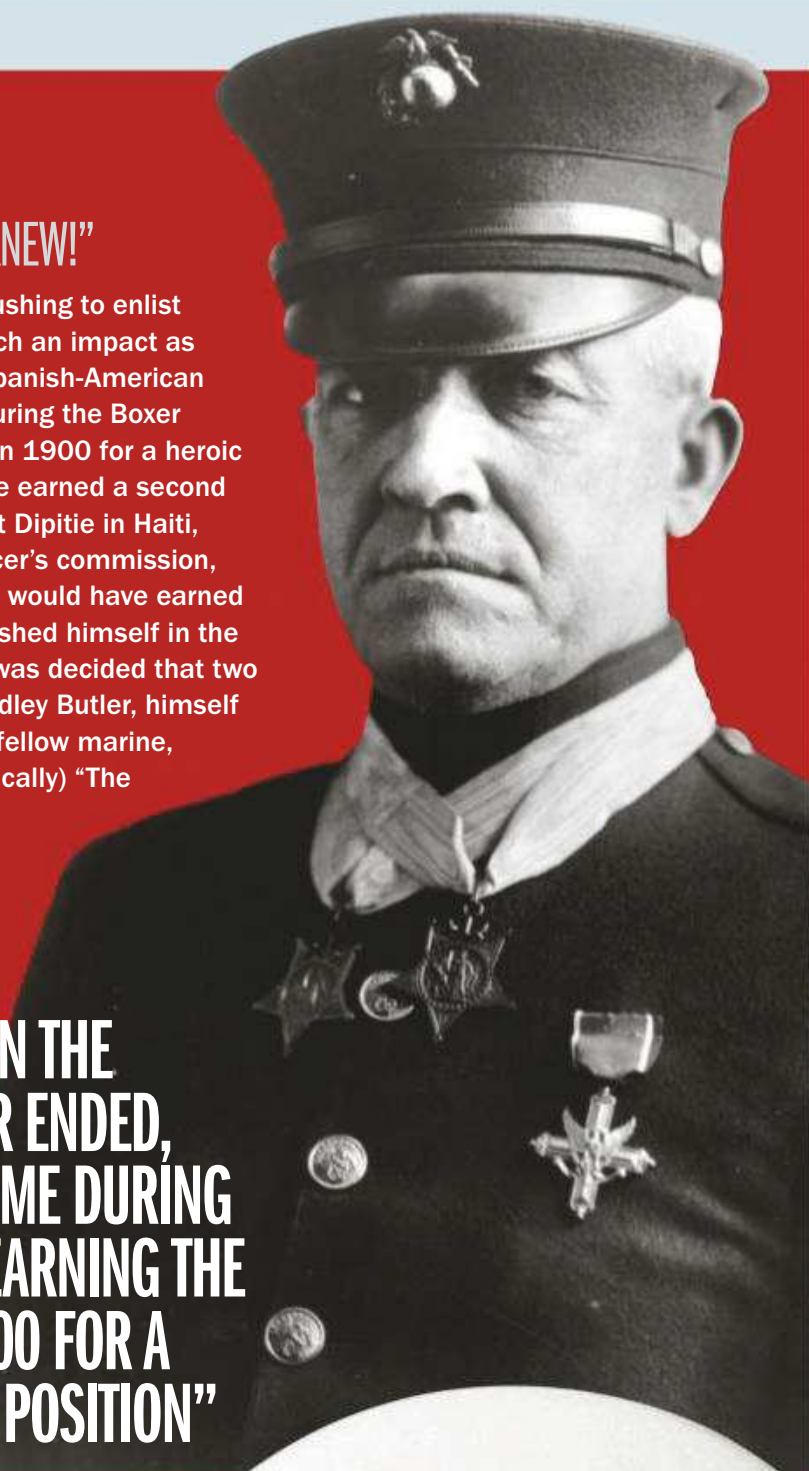
Sanderson served during both world wars and excelled as a flight instructor

DANIEL DALY
 1873-1937
 "THE FIGHTIN'EST MARINE I EVER KNEW!"

There are many stories of young men rushing to enlist when war breaks out, but few made such an impact as Daniel Daly. Still in training when the Spanish-American War ended, he made up for lost time during the Boxer Rebellion, winning the Medal of Honor in 1900 for a heroic defence of his position. Not satisfied, he earned a second Medal of Honor during the Battle of Fort Dipitie in Haiti, in 1915. Daly refused to accept an officer's commission, preferring to remain a sergeant, and he would have earned a third Medal of Honor, having distinguished himself in the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918, but it was decided that two should be the limit. Major General Smedley Butler, himself a two-time Medal of Honor winner and fellow marine, dubbed Daly (colourfully, if ungrammatically) "The fightin'est Marine I ever knew!"

The only reason Daly didn't earn three Medals of Honor was that the limit was set at two

"STILL IN TRAINING WHEN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR ENDED, HE MADE UP FOR LOST TIME DURING THE BOXER REBELLION, EARNING THE MEDAL OF HONOR IN 1900 FOR A HEROIC DEFENCE OF HIS POSITION"



JOHN HERSCHEL GLENN JR.
 1921-2016 MARINE, TEST PILOT, ASTRONAUT, SENATOR

It would be difficult to imagine a more action-packed life than that led by John Glenn, a true American hero. As a Marine Corps fighter pilot in two wars, he earned multiple medals for bravery. He flew the F4U Corsair in World War II, followed by action in the F9F Panther in Korea. As part of an exchange program with the US Air Force, he then flew the superior F-86 Sabre. After making the transition to the daredevil life of a test pilot, he was the first man to fly across the entire United States mainland at supersonic speeds in 1957, and neatly transitioned to the even more dangerous life of an astronaut, in which role he became the first American to orbit the Earth. After finally settling down, he served as a United States senator for Ohio.

"IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A MORE ACTION-PACKED LIFE"



Any form of flying vehicle was irresistible to John Glenn

UNITS & TACTICS

A stunningly wide range of personnel have operated under the banner of the United States Marine Corps

As the official hymn states, “We fight our country’s battles, in the air, on land and sea”. From its early days to the modern era, the Marine Corps has always been willing to adapt to new demands and styles of warfare. Here are just a few of the unique units that have emerged during the corps’ long history.

CONTINENTAL MARINE

THE NEED FOR A FORCE OF MARINES WAS RECOGNISED FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE AMERICAN ARMED FORCES

The first marine units were formed during the American War of Independence, giving the Marine Corps a birthday of 10 November 1775. Equipped in the same manner as standard infantrymen, they were nevertheless required to be experienced seamen or at least “acquainted with maritime affairs”, as they were intended to fight on ship as well as on land, in addition to taking part in amphibious assaults. Their first such landing was during a raid on Nassau, in the Bahamas, in 1776 (pictured).



KEY CONFLICTS
REVOLUTIONARY WAR

“SHOWN HERE IS THE M2-2 FLAMETHROWER, BUT THERE WERE ALSO ROCKET LAUNCHERS, BLOWTORCHES, BAZOOKAS AND OTHER WEAPONRY”

KEY CONFLICTS
WWII, KOREAN WAR, VIETNAM WAR

FLAMETHROWER TEAM

SAVAGE FIGHTING DURING THE ISLAND-HOPPING BATTLES OF THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC DEMANDED SPECIAL TROOPS

Assault platoons were formed in each battalion of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions during World War II, equipped with a variety of specialised equipment. Shown here is the M2-2 flamethrower (note the rifleman poised to take care of any enemy soldiers flushed out of their cover), but there were also rocket launchers, blowtorches, bazookas and other weaponry.

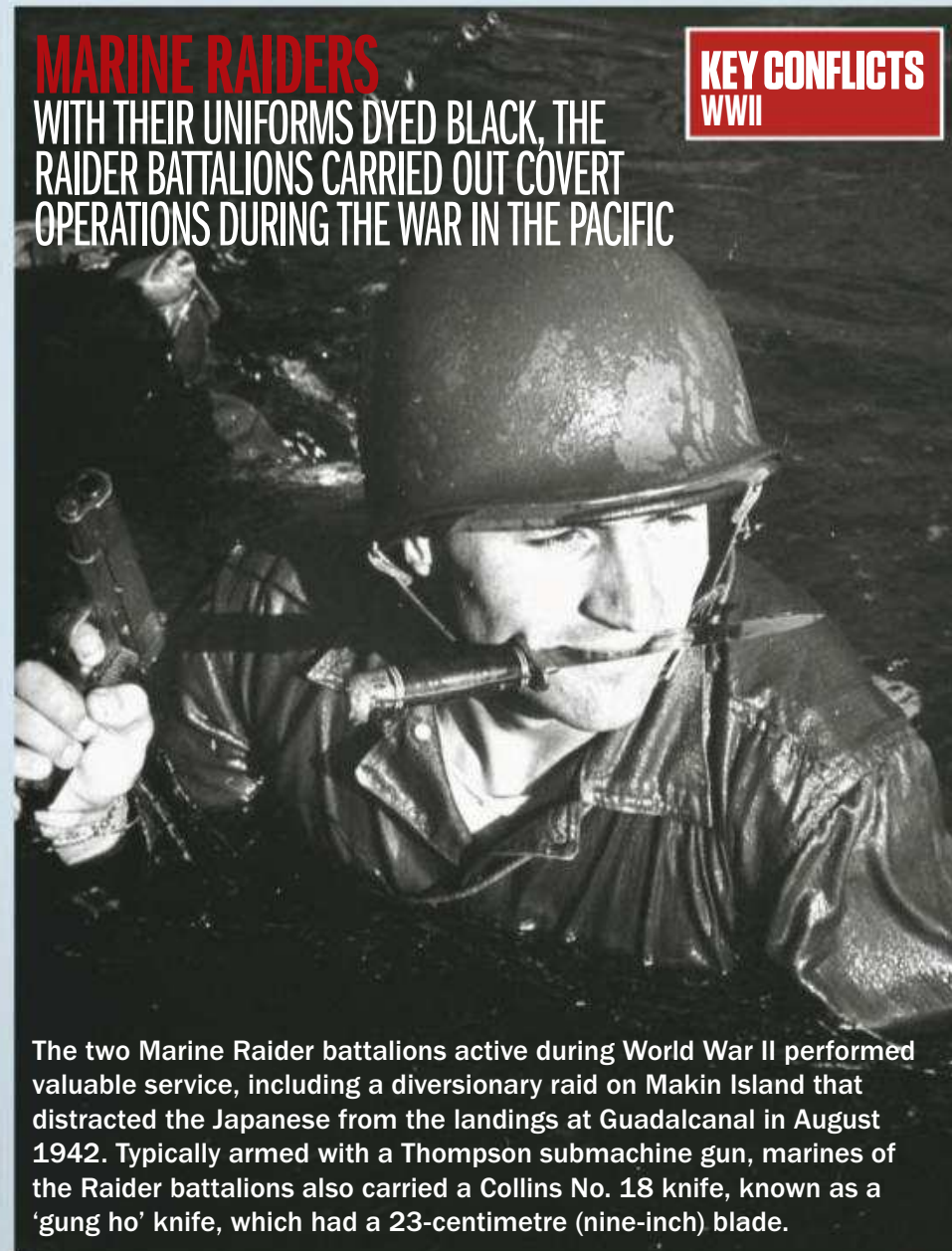
Each platoon was comprised of two rifle squads and a demolition squad, with this squad further divided into separate teams. The flamethrower team included two flamethrowers and riflemen escorts. The demolition team was armed with bangalore torpedoes and satchel charges, while a pin-up team wielded BARs (light machine guns) and bazookas.



KEY CONFLICTS
GULF WAR, IRAQ WAR

F/A-18D FIGHTER PILOT
THE MARINE CORPS OFFICIALLY ADDED AN AVIATION CAPABILITY AS LONG AGO AS 1912

Among the many faces of the modern Marine Corps are fighter pilots like this one, at the controls of a McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet. The fighter/attack aircraft started service with the US Navy in 1983, and became part of the Marine Corps' arsenal the following year. The Corps operated 84 Hornets in the First Gulf War in 1991 and is expected to continue flying the plane for at least another decade.



MARINE RAIDERS
WITH THEIR UNIFORMS DYED BLACK, THE RAIDER BATTALIONS CARRIED OUT COVERT OPERATIONS DURING THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

KEY CONFLICTS
WWII

The two Marine Raider battalions active during World War II performed valuable service, including a diversionary raid on Makin Island that distracted the Japanese from the landings at Guadalcanal in August 1942. Typically armed with a Thompson submachine gun, marines of the Raider battalions also carried a Collins No. 18 knife, known as a 'gung ho' knife, which had a 23-centimetre (nine-inch) blade.



“WITH A MOTTO OF ‘ONE SHOT, ONE KILL’, THE MARINE CORPS SCOUT SNIPER UNITS WERE FIRST FORMED IN 1966”

SCOUT SNIPER
THE TWO-MAN TEAMS WERE FIRST ESTABLISHED WITH THE US MARINES IN 1966

KEY CONFLICTS
VIETNAM, GULF WAR

With a motto of 'one shot, one kill', the Marine Corps Scout Sniper units were first formed in 1966, although snipers had operated with the corps much earlier than that. In World War II, for instance, the Marines deployed snipers covered by regular infantry. A World War II sniper might have wielded an M1903 rifle fitted with an 8x telescopic sight. The bolt-action weapon, which had seen service in World War I, was used as a sniper rifle into the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

In 1966 a training regimen was established for the Scout Snipers, who operated in two-man teams, one spotting targets and the other operating the rifle (teams were sometimes interchangeable). During the Vietnam War, Carlos Hathcock made the longest confirmed kill for a marine sniper when hitting an enemy soldier 2,286 metres (2,500 yards) away, using an M2 Browning machine gun fitted with a telescopic sight.

A vintage biplane is flying in the sky above a tank in a desert. The tank is a heavy, tracked vehicle with a large turret and a long barrel. The scene is set in a sandy, arid landscape under a clear blue sky.

BREAKING ROMMEL'S SIEGE

WORDS MIKE HASKEW

FOR EIGHT LONG MONTHS, COMMONWEALTH AND ALLIED FORCES ORGANISED THE DEFENCE OF TOBRUK, DENYING AN ADVANCE PORT TO FACILITATE AN AXIS INVASION OF EGYPT. THIS ARGUABLY SAVED BRITISH FORCES FROM AN HUMILIATING EARLY DEFEAT IN THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

Erwin Rommel
led the Axis
forces at Tobruk

Throughout the ebb and flow of the North African Campaign during World War II, Tobruk, a major port city on the Mediterranean coast of Libya, was a glittering prize.

Possession of Tobruk facilitated operations east and west, and it became the scene of desperate fighting several times.

However, the heroic defence of the city during more than 240 days of siege, from April to December 1941, is remembered as a defining chapter in the history of the armed forces of Britain and the Commonwealth. The epic siege itself came about somewhat by accident. Operation Compass, a British counter-offensive intended for only a limited duration, became a sustained action that produced a resounding triumph in the desert against the Italian Tenth Army. However, its bitter unintended consequence was the deployment of German forces – the vaunted Deutsches Afrika Korps – to the continent. The Afrika Korps commander, General Erwin Rommel, was later to become the ‘Desert Fox’, the stuff of legend.

In response to the Italian invasion of Egypt in the autumn of 1940, the British Western Desert Force, numbering only 36,000, struck back at the 250,000-man Italian Tenth Army, repelling the invaders and carrying the fight across the Libyan frontier. General Richard O'Connor swept across the desert, occupying the whole of the province of Cyrenaica in eastern Libya and bagging 130,000 prisoners during operations from December 1940 to February 1941. The crowning achievement was the capture of Tobruk, which fell to Commonwealth forces in late January.

The entire dynamic of the desert war had been altered in favour of the Allies. But two significant developments rapidly removed the lustre of their accomplishments.

Early exit and bold entrance

By May, Winston Churchill was asserting that Allied forces in Greece needed support, and Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, head of

“THE AFRIKA KORPS COMMANDER, GENERAL ERWIN ROMMEL, WAS LATER TO BECOME THE ‘DESERT FOX’, THE STUFF OF LEGEND”

Middle East Command, transferred much of his available troops and equipment there. At the same time, Germany committed forces to bolster its flagging Italian ally in North Africa.

The first German formations to arrive had reached the Libyan capital and port of Tripoli in February 1941, and Rommel was there to meet them. The Afrika Korps comprised the 5th Light Division, 15th Panzer Division and later the 90th Light Division. Together with six Italian armoured and infantry divisions – Ariete, Savona, Trieste, Brescia, Bologna and Pavia – these Axis formations constituted Panzergruppe Afrika, which formed in August 1941. Though nominally under Italian command for most of his North African sojourn, it was understood that Rommel ran the show.

Although he had been told to delay an offensive until his strength was further augmented, Rommel demurred, intent on taking advantage of an opportunity that he rightly recognised as fleeting. “We must attack Tobruk with everything we have before Tommy has time to dig in!” he told his lieutenants. On 24 March 1941 Rommel unleashed a lightning offensive that took the British by surprise. On the first day, his spearheads gobbled up El Agheila. Within two weeks, they had retaken Barce and Derna. Commonwealth forces fled. German columns rolled onto the coastal plain near Gazala and executed flanking movements to trap enemy troops as they retired. To compound the misery, both O'Connor and General Philip Neame were captured before dawn on 7 April, depriving the British of two highly capable commanders.

“TOBRUK MUST BE HELD. THERE IS NOTHING BETWEEN YOU AND CAIRO”

– Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell

Allied soldiers observe
Axis artillery fire



Image: Piotr Forakiewicz

Mounting a defence

Located 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of the Egyptian border, Tobruk offered the Germans a deep water port roughly 430 kilometres (265 miles) east of Benghazi – a forward base of supply that might facilitate a masterstroke into the heart of Egypt, perhaps all the way to Cairo and the strategically vital Suez Canal. If Tobruk remained in Commonwealth possession, it would constitute a thorn in Rommel's side, a conduit for potential resupply of troops and equipment that would threaten his rear, while the German supply lines would be appreciably lengthened across the desert.

Although initially on their heels, the British, Australian and Indian soldiers of the renamed XIII Corps, and later the New Zealanders, Poles and Czechs brought into the fray, realised to a man the importance of Tobruk. Wavell gathered his subordinate officers at a hotel on the city's waterfront on 8 April and told them frankly, "Tobruk must be held. There is nothing between you and Cairo."

Commanded by Australian General Leslie Morshead, nicknamed 'Ming the Merciless' by his men after the villain of the *Flash Gordon* radio and comic strip series, the 23,000 defenders of Tobruk consisted of elements of several Australian infantry brigades, including the 26th, the 18th and 24th, which had escaped encirclement by the Germans at Derna during their retreat, and the 20th Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division, along with the 18th Brigade of the 7th Division. These troops were bolstered by the 25-pounder (11.5-kilogram)

artillery of the 1st/104th Essex Yeomanry and 107th South Nottingham Hussars of the Royal Horse Artillery, the 51st Field Regiment Royal Artillery, along with the 18th Indian Cavalry, the 1st Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, the antitank guns of the 2/3rd Australian Antitank Regiment and the 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, as well as assorted anti-aircraft units. To counter Rommel's PzKpfw. III and IV tanks, the battered remnants of the British 2nd Armoured Division mustered 22 tanks – a mixed bag of Matilda IIs and Cruiser Mk. I, Mk. II and Mk. IIIs.

Morshead made the most of the defences at Tobruk, positioning more than 40 of his big guns so that they could fire over the defensive perimeter at any point without moving. He repurposed Italian coastal guns, turning them inland. The defensive perimeter extended roughly 48 kilometres (30 miles), and the outer band, designated the Red Line, stretched 13-16 kilometres (eight to ten miles) from the inner port. It was constructed with an antitank

**"THERE'LL BE NO DUNKIRK
HERE. IF WE SHOULD HAVE TO
GET OUT, WE SHALL FIGHT OUR
WAY OUT. THERE IS TO BE NO
SURRENDER AND NO RETREAT"**

German soldiers, two carrying machine guns over their shoulders, move to a new position during the eight-month siege of Tobruk



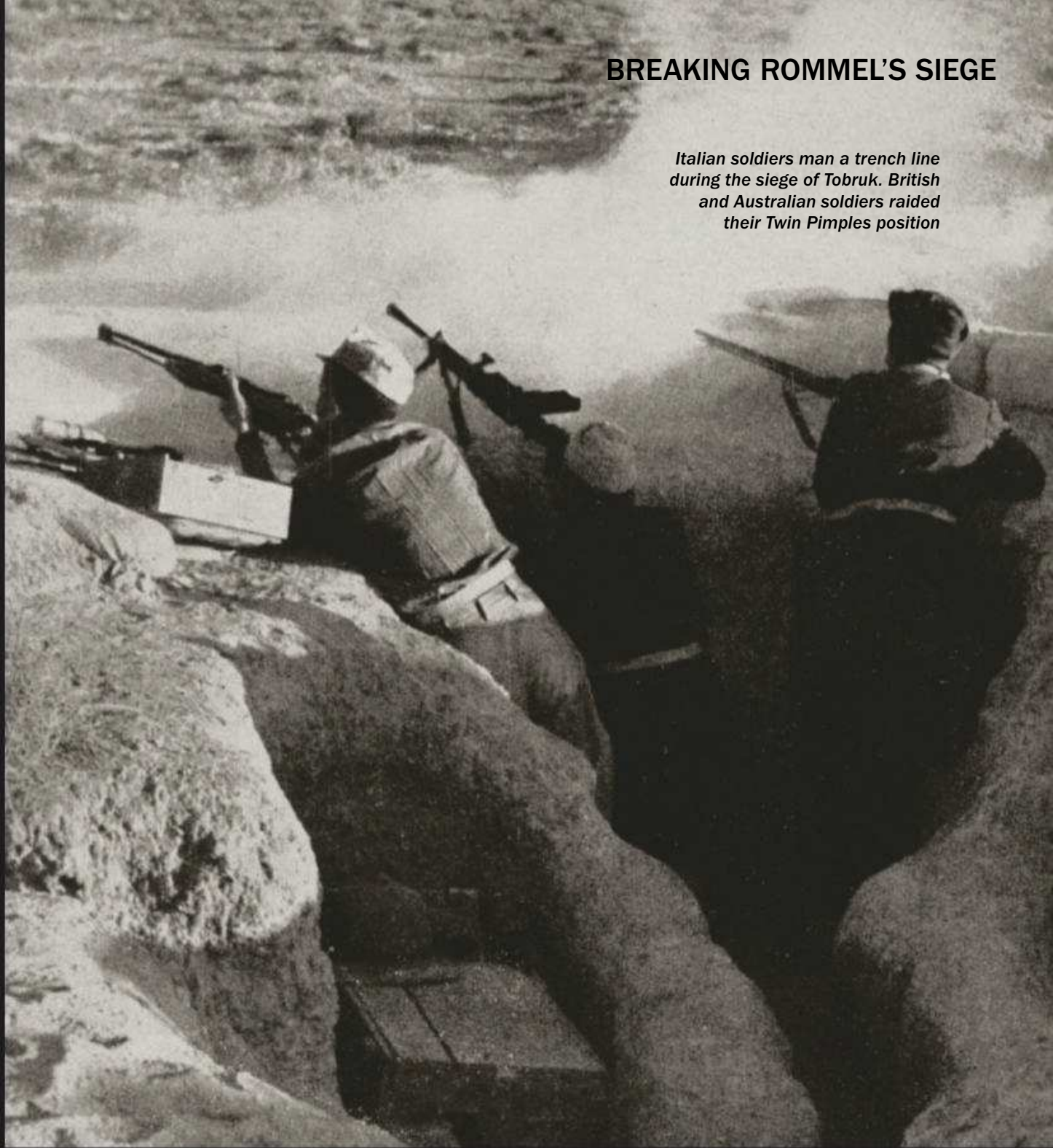
ditch and an extensive minefield that was laced with barbed wire entanglements. At least 150 strongpoints dotted the defences, including those originally constructed by the Italians and improved by the new occupants. Many of these were concrete reinforced bunkers bristling with Vickers machine guns and Bren guns. Morshead also utilised a network of fortified caves. Early in the siege, he had air support from Hawker Hurricane fighters of No. 72 Squadron and intelligence from the observation planes of No. 6 Squadron, RAF.

“There’ll be no Dunkirk here”

As the Germans approached, Morshead was resolute. Referring to the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from continental Europe a year earlier, he bluntly stated, “There’ll be no Dunkirk here. If we should have to get out, we shall fight our way out. There is to be no surrender and no retreat.”

The Afrika Korps vanguard roared into the vicinity of Tobruk on 10 April 1941. Intending

Italian soldiers man a trench line during the siege of Tobruk. British and Australian soldiers raided their Twin Pimples position



THE TWIN PIMPLES RAID

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK IN THE SUMMER OF 1941, THE DEFENDING COMMONWEALTH COMMAND MAINTAINED HIGH MORALE & STRUCK SMALL-SCALE BLOWS AGAINST THE INVESTING AXIS FORCES UNDER GENERAL ERWIN ROMMEL

One of the most successful raids occurred on the night of 17-18 July, when elements of No. 8 Guards Commando and the Royal Australian Engineers executed an assault against an Italian strongpoint outside the Tobruk perimeter, identified as the Twin Pimples.

The Twin Pimples raid serves as an excellent example of timing, execution and cooperation. The terrain feature derived its name from a pair of hills located close together and occupied by the Italians. The 18th King Edward's Own Cavalry held the Tobruk line directly opposite, and a raid involving three officers and 40 soldiers of No. 8 Commando was organised to cross a supply road in front of the Italian positions and attack the high ground from behind.

The commandos set off at 11pm and crossed in front of the enemy post undetected. Under cover, they waited for two hours before the 18th Cavalry Regiment executed a diversionary attack. When the Italians were alerted to the diversion, their positions erupted in small-arms fire, and flares lit the night sky. The subsequent commando advance was undetected until the attackers were within 27 metres (30 yards)

of the Twin Pimples. Swiftly, the commandos took the Italian positions, and the engineers moved in to plant explosives at several mortar emplacements while also destroying an ammunition dump. Planners had estimated that supporting Italian positions would require 15 minutes before their artillery came into action, and the commandos were roughly 91 metres (100 yards) away when the enemy guns began firing.

Although some operational issues had emerged, the mission was deemed a success, with just four commandos wounded and one dead.

Lt. Col. David Stirling of No. 8 Commando went on to found the Special Air Service in the summer of 1941



BREAKING ROMMEL'S SIEGE

to maintain his momentum, Rommel made a tactical error, failing to appreciate the strength of the port city's defences. Originally, he had intended to sweep eastwards and surround Tobruk before initiating a direct assault. Upon arrival, he determined that such a preparatory movement was unnecessary and immediately ordered the 15th Panzer Division, under General Heinrich von Pritwitz und Gaffron, to attack directly from the west. This assault was roughly handled and Pritwitz was killed.

Reconsidering his initial plan, Rommel executed the flanking movement early on 11 April, investing Tobruk with an array of firepower. In the east, south and west, he positioned the 5th Light Division, 15th Panzer Division and the Brescia Division respectively. The remaining Italian infantry divisions and the sole Italian armoured division, Ariete, were held in reserve.

Shortly after noon that day, the storm opened up again on Tobruk as the 5th Panzer Regiment hit the Australian 20th Brigade west of the El Adem road and lost five tanks before grinding to a halt. In the late afternoon, separate infantry attacks involving 1,100 soldiers failed to make gains. A second attack was supported by both German and Italian tanks, with several falling victim to antitank defences and four counterattacking British tanks. As daylight waned, the Axis forces pulled back after sustaining significant casualties. Rommel had once again been frustrated, having written to his wife Lucie at home in Germany that he was confident of victory: "Dear Lu, today may well see the end of the Battle of Tobruk."

Instead, it was merely the bloody beginning. Rommel licked his wounds and two days later sent the 5th Light Division forward at dusk against the 8th Machine Gun Battalion. The Australians fought desperately and threw the enemy back with heavy casualties.

A 26-year-old corporal of the 2/17th Infantry Battalion, John Hurst 'Jack' Edmondson, earned a posthumous Victoria Cross on the night of 13-14 April. As German infantry breached the barbed wire obstacle near his position and set up half a dozen machine guns, along with mortars and artillery pieces, Edmondson and six others mounted a bayonet charge against

Below: Australian General Leslie Morshead bullishly fought to defend Tobruk during the siege

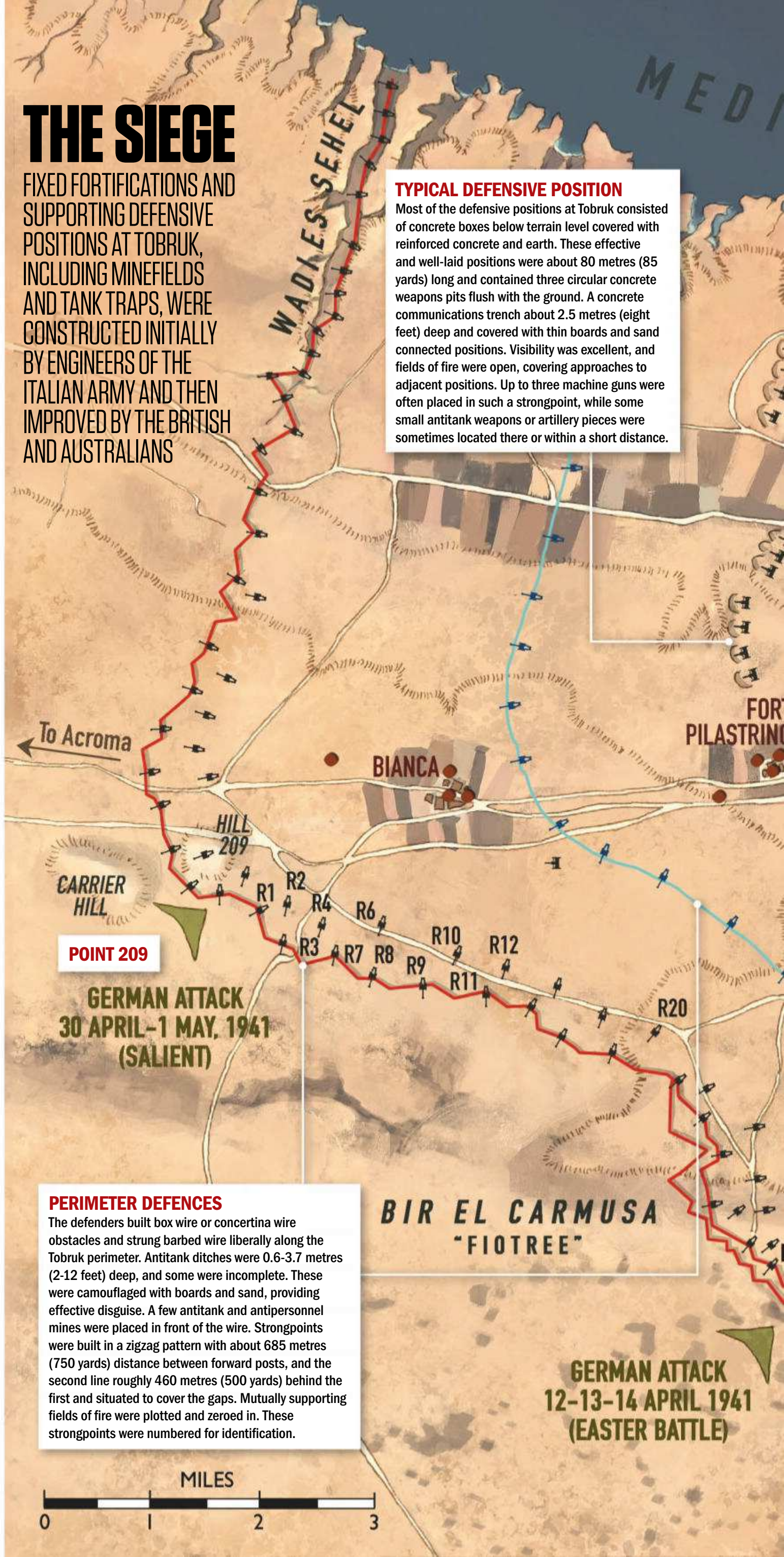


THE SIEGE

FIXED FORTIFICATIONS AND SUPPORTING DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AT TOBRUK, INCLUDING MINEFIELDS AND TANK TRAPS, WERE CONSTRUCTED INITIALLY BY ENGINEERS OF THE ITALIAN ARMY AND THEN IMPROVED BY THE BRITISH AND AUSTRALIANS

TYPICAL DEFENSIVE POSITION

Most of the defensive positions at Tobruk consisted of concrete boxes below terrain level covered with reinforced concrete and earth. These effective and well-laid positions were about 80 metres (85 yards) long and contained three circular concrete weapons pits flush with the ground. A concrete communications trench about 2.5 metres (eight feet) deep and covered with thin boards and sand connected positions. Visibility was excellent, and fields of fire were open, covering approaches to adjacent positions. Up to three machine guns were often placed in such a strongpoint, while some small antitank weapons or artillery pieces were sometimes located there or within a short distance.



POINT 209

**GERMAN ATTACK
30 APRIL-1 MAY, 1941
(SALIENT)**

PERIMETER DEFENCES

The defenders built box wire or concertina wire obstacles and strung barbed wire liberally along the Tobruk perimeter. Antitank ditches were 0.6-3.7 metres (2-12 feet) deep, and some were incomplete. These were camouflaged with boards and sand, providing effective disguise. A few antitank and antipersonnel mines were placed in front of the wire. Strongpoints were built in a zigzag pattern with about 685 metres (750 yards) distance between forward posts, and the second line roughly 460 metres (500 yards) behind the first and situated to cover the gaps. Mutually supporting fields of fire were plotted and zeroed in. These strongpoints were numbered for identification.

**BIR EL CARMUSA
"FIOTREE"**

**GERMAN ATTACK
12-13-14 APRIL 1941
(EASTER BATTLE)**

MILES





Perimeter defenses (RED LINE) —

Perimeter defenses (BLUE LINE) —

Strongpoints

Artillery R.H.A.

Artillery Bush

Outposts

Tanks

Map: Rocio Espin

DEFENCE IN DEPTH

The defences of Tobruk, much of them originally constructed by Italian engineers, were arranged in three lines. The first, the Red Line, 13-16 kilometres (eight to ten miles) from the inner harbour, consisted of mutually supporting fortifications, artillery emplacements and antitank minefields designed to disrupt any penetration. The second, the Blue Line, was three kilometres (two miles) behind the Red Line and manned by three reserve battalions. General Morshead instructed forward positions to hold while the Blue Line absorbed any breakthrough. If the enemy breached the Blue Line and mobile reserves could not hold, available forces were to concentrate at the innermost Green Line for the last stand.

ARTILLERY POSITIONS

The devastating use of artillery had a telling effect on the Axis effort to capture Tobruk. Morshead skilfully placed as many as 40 artillery pieces so that they could fire in virtually any threatened direction without being relocated. One of the most effective uses of artillery occurred between 30 April-1 May when the 25-pounder guns of the 51st Field Regiment blasted the German effort to capture Point 209. Although they were temporarily successful, the Germans could not hold their deepest penetrations, largely due to the galling British artillery fire. Morshead also employed captured Italian guns, known as Bush Artillery, turning them from coastal positions to face inland.

TERRANEAN SEA

TOBRUK NORTH POINT

TOBRUK HARBOUR

WADI AUDA

FORT AIRENTE

FORT SOLARO

EL GUBI

CEMETERY

EL ADEM CROSSROADS

TUTE

WADI ES ZENTUM

To Bardia

Jack

White Cairn

Jim

Bash

Bondi

BIR EL AZAZI

Plonk

Cooma

To El Adem

R33 R32 R34 R35

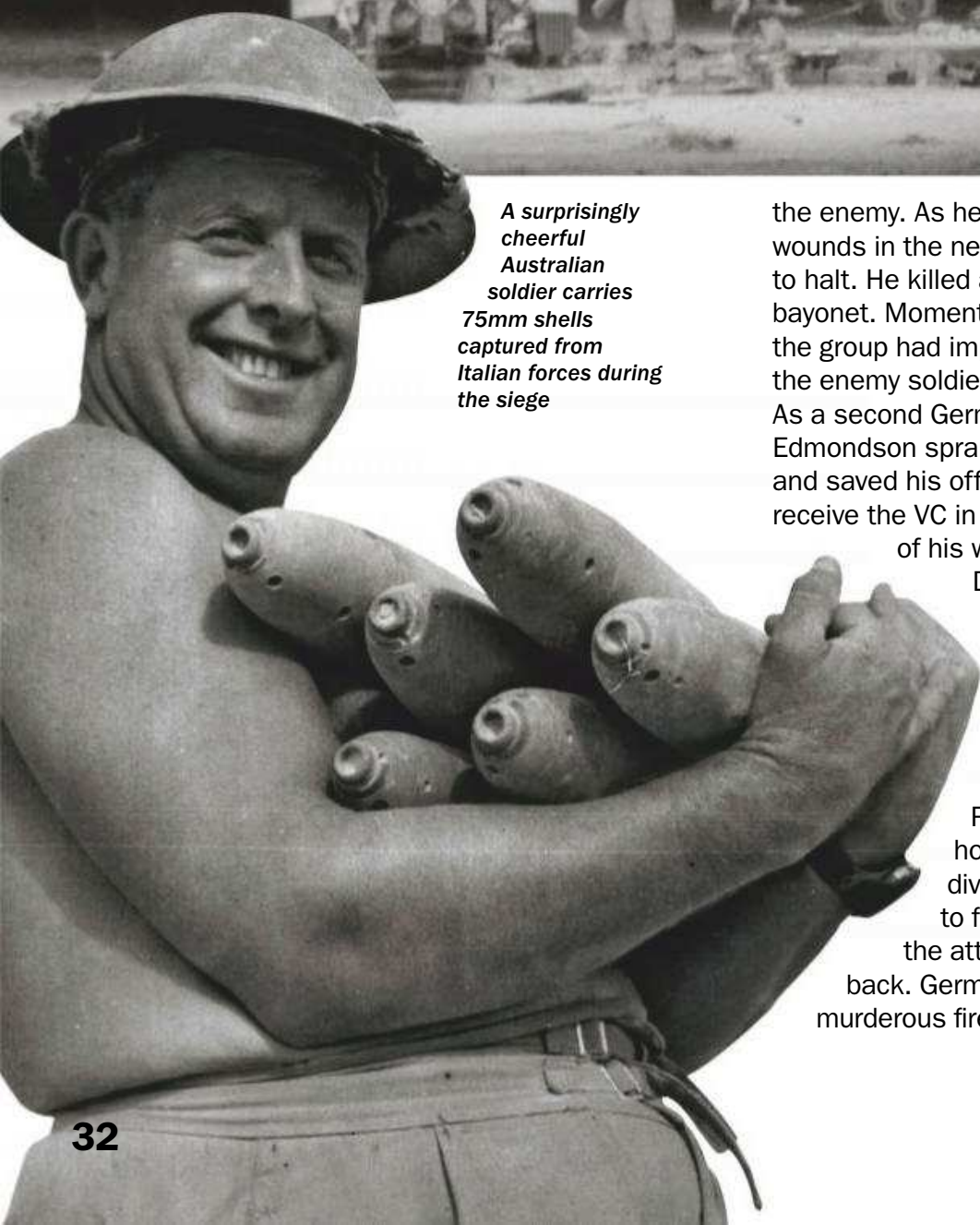
R45

R54 R55

R70

“ONE GROUP OF INDIAN ARMY SOLDIERS RETURNED FROM A NOCTURNAL FORAY WITH TWO BAGS THAT HELD 32 SEVERED EARS. ANOTHER PATROL FORCED AN ENTIRE BATTALION OF ELITE ITALIAN BERSAGLIERI TO SURRENDER”

Anti-aircraft guns illuminate the desert night, 1941



A surprisingly cheerful Australian soldier carries 75mm shells captured from Italian forces during the siege

the enemy. As he ran forward, Edmondson took wounds in the neck and stomach but refused to halt. He killed a German soldier with his bayonet. Moments later, the officer who led the group had impaled another German, but the enemy soldier continued to grip his legs. As a second German attacked the officer, Edmondson sprang forward, killed both Germans and saved his officer's life. The first Australian to receive the VC in World War II, Edmondson died of his wounds within hours.

Despite the young soldier's heroics, the Australians were compelled to fall back an hour later under the weight of an attack by 200 German soldiers, who managed to penetrate the Red Line temporarily. Rommel, however, had been forced to divert troops from another sector to fight Edmondson's unit, and the attacking troops were pulled back. German tanks were subjected to murderous fire during the withdrawal, and

several were destroyed by antitank guns that had been camouflaged.

The defenders of Tobruk took heavy losses as well. Every inch of their position was within range of German and Italian artillery. The Luftwaffe was a continuing threat as Junkers Ju-87 'Stuka' dive bombers screamed down in near-vertical dives to deliver their lethal payloads. "They timed their run to coincide with the position of the sun so that they were on us before we could really see them," remembered one veteran of the siege. "What with the banshee blood-curdling scream of diving aircraft, the anti-aircraft barrage and exploding bombs, it was a nerve-racking experience."

The resurgent Rats

After Nazi propagandists referred to Tobruk's beleaguered defenders as rats caught in a trap, the defenders began calling themselves the 'Rats of Tobruk'. They endured tremendous privations. Food and water were always in short supply. Clouds of black flies and mosquitoes plagued them. Lice and fleas tormented them during fitful attempts to sleep. The men were





Above: A brigadier gives instructions to tank commanders, November 1941



Above: Allied soldiers using a captured Breda anti-aircraft gun during the siege of Tobruk, May 1941

German forces fighting outside Tobruk. The siege slowly sapped Axis strength, finally compelling them to halt offensive operations and later to withdraw



tired and ragged but full of fight, so decided to mete out some terror of their own. In addition to a robust defence, they regularly slipped past the German lines at night, sometimes in patrols of up to 20, slitting throats, setting booby traps, blowing up ammunition dumps and generally creating chaos. One group of Indian Army soldiers returned from a nocturnal foray with two bags that held 32 severed ears. Another patrol forced an entire battalion of elite Italian Bersaglieri to surrender.

Meanwhile, Rommel pounded away at the Red Line, and General Friedrich Paulus arrived at the behest of high command to observe operations and hopefully quell Rommel's penchant for ignoring orders. In the predawn hours of 14 April, the Germans tried to crack the nut that was Tobruk yet again, but the result was a harsh rebuff. Following artillery and Stuka strikes, tanks rumbled forward as the 5th Panzer Regiment managed to stake out a small lodgement at the El Adem road three kilometres (two miles) inside the Red Line.

Unaware that they had been coaxed into a trap, the German tankers pressed forward, past

“WHAT WITH THE BANSHEE BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM OF DIVING AIRCRAFT, THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT BARRAGE AND EXPLODING BOMBS, IT WAS A NERVE-RACKING EXPERIENCE”

the quiet Australian defences. The German infantry followed, but as they passed the defenders erupted with every weapon at hand. Assailed from both flanks, the advance turned quickly into a rout. Antitank fire was pressed home from short range, in some instances from only 550 metres (600 yards). British artillery barked and machine guns clattered. Crusader tanks, dug in for protection, blasted away. By the time the Germans backed out of the meat grinder, 16 of 36 tanks were destroyed and dozens of infantrymen were dead or wounded.

Rommel's frustration boiled over as one tank commander referred to the fight as a “witch's cauldron” and muttered that he had been fortunate to escape alive. The Desert Fox refocused, swinging his attacks to the west. At 5.30pm on 15 April, he sent 1,000 Italian

troops forward against the Australian 2nd Battalion, 24th Brigade. The attack made good initial progress, compelling the defenders to retreat from forward positions, but reinforcing infantry and the steady fire of the 51st Field Regiment caused the attack to peter out. The following night, Italian infantry of the 1st Battalion, 62nd Trento Regiment attacked near Acroma. When the tank commanders of the Ariete Division refused to advance and remained hull-down in a wadi, Rommel was incensed. But the armour stayed put. 800 Italian infantrymen were cut off and captured.

Still pricking the enemy's thumb, Morshead ordered a pair of raids on the night of 22 April. They bagged nearly 450 German and Italian prisoners near the Ras El Madauar area in the southwest perimeter.

BREAKING ROMMEL'S SIEGE



Allied tankers and their vehicles lined up in the desert, Tobruk, 1941



Crewmen aboard a British tank watch a long line of Axis prisoners march into captivity during the 241-day siege of Tobruk

An all-out assault

Rommel regrouped for more than a week. Then, on 30 April, he unleashed a powerful attack against the western perimeter near Ras el Madauar. His first objective was Point 209, an observation post for the guns of the 51st Field Regiment. German troops of the fresh 104th Rifle Regiment joined Italians of the Brescia Division at dusk, breaching the perimeter and taking Point 209 about five hours later. Several strongpoints fell to the onslaught, and by daylight on 1 May the Desert Fox had ordered tanks into the gap in the British line. The armour split into two columns, right to support the Brescia Division and left to attack the 51st Field Regiment's gun emplacements at Wadi Giaida.

Bucking up against the major threat, the reserve company of the 2/24th Battalion stepped up with an antitank gun company in support. As the Australians fired briskly, the German tanks ran into a minefield. For more than two hours they were trapped under heavy artillery fire. Although several strongpoints were overrun, others stood firm. Morshead ordered an afternoon counterattack, but several tanks were disabled and the 2/48th Battalion took heavy casualties. Rommel conceded his deepest penetration but maintained control of a five-kilometre (three-mile) salient into the Red Line, at a cost of 46 of the 81 tanks employed, either to mechanical breakdowns or enemy fire.

While a sandstorm limited operations on 2 May, Morshead reinforced his defences around the German penetration. Subsequent counterattacks by the 18th Brigade failed to dislodge them, and the salient remained intact as Rommel came to grips with the failure to take Tobruk by direct attack, settling further into siege mode. Rommel began to plan offensive operations further east as Paulus advised him against another attempt to take Tobruk. A flurry of messages from Berlin warned Rommel not to attack Tobruk again or undertake any other offensive operations

“HEAVY FIGHTING ERUPTED AS EACH SIDE VIED FOR CONTROL OF HALFAYA PASS NEAR THE PORT TOWN OF SOLLUM. THE BRITISH TOOK CONTROL OF THE AREA, NICKNAMED ‘HELLFIRE PASS’, BUT WERE DRIVEN BACK”

for the foreseeable future. The failure of the attack of 30 April-1 May, among the first major setbacks for the German army in WWII, ended the immediate threat to Tobruk. The succeeding months were largely consumed with artillery bombardment, raids and periods of inactivity.

Brevity and Battleaxe

Winston Churchill and General Wavell were both encouraged by the defence of Tobruk, and the prime minister urged him to attempt a relief effort. Operation Brevity was launched on 15 May as British troops advanced from defensive positions along the Egyptian frontier. Heavy fighting erupted as each side vied for control of Halfaya Pass near the port town of Sollum. The British took control of the area, nicknamed ‘Hellfire Pass’, but were driven back, and the offensive was called off.

A month later Wavell launched a second relief attempt, Operation Battleaxe, which was a dismal failure. British armoured tactics were woefully inadequate, and accurate fire from the highly effective German 88mm guns – originally anti-aircraft weapons innovatively employed in an antitank role – took a heavy toll. During three days of fighting, the British lost 45 Crusader tanks, 27 Cruiser tanks and 64 Matilda IIs. On the heels of the debacle,

Wavell was informed that he was being replaced by General Claude Auchinleck.

At the same time, a political crisis occurred in Australia as the government of Prime Minister Robert Menzies was toppled and the new leadership clamoured for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Tobruk to rejoin their comrades in other areas. The Australians were replaced by the British 70th Division, the Polish Carpathian Brigade and the Czech 11th Battalion between August and October.

Final relief

Since the fighting had begun in April, the defenders of Tobruk had suffered heavily. Incessant Luftwaffe air attacks were hazardous to shipping that brought much-needed supplies and reinforcements into the harbour. Artillery pounded their positions relentlessly. Still, they had clung to their posts and parried each of Rommel's thrusts.

By late November, with the siege in its seventh month, the recently constituted British Eighth Army initiated Operation Crusader, an offensive intended to relieve Tobruk and destroy Axis armour in the process. On 18 November, British and German tanks clashed in a driving rain at Sidi Rezegh about 16 kilometres (ten miles) southeast of the Red Line. Repeated engagements sapped Rommel's strength, and a battle on 7 December, in which the 4th Armoured Brigade knocked out 11 tanks of the 15th Panzer Division, was indicative of the losses the Afrika Korps was regularly absorbing.

Resupply was becoming problematic for the Germans and Italians, and Rommel reluctantly withdrew to Gazala. On 10 December, elements of Eighth Army marched into Tobruk in triumph. The great siege had been costly, the Allies losing nearly 4,000 killed, wounded and captured, and the Axis forces approximately twice that number. For the Desert Fox, the setback was only temporary. Within months he returned to Tobruk with a vengeance.

SURVIVING THE SIEGE

In 1941 Dennis Middleton was on the frontline, defending Tobruk against fierce Axis assaults. He recorded his incredible experiences in a memoir, which reveals what day-to-day life in the siege was like

WORDS JEREMY & DENNIS MIDDLETON

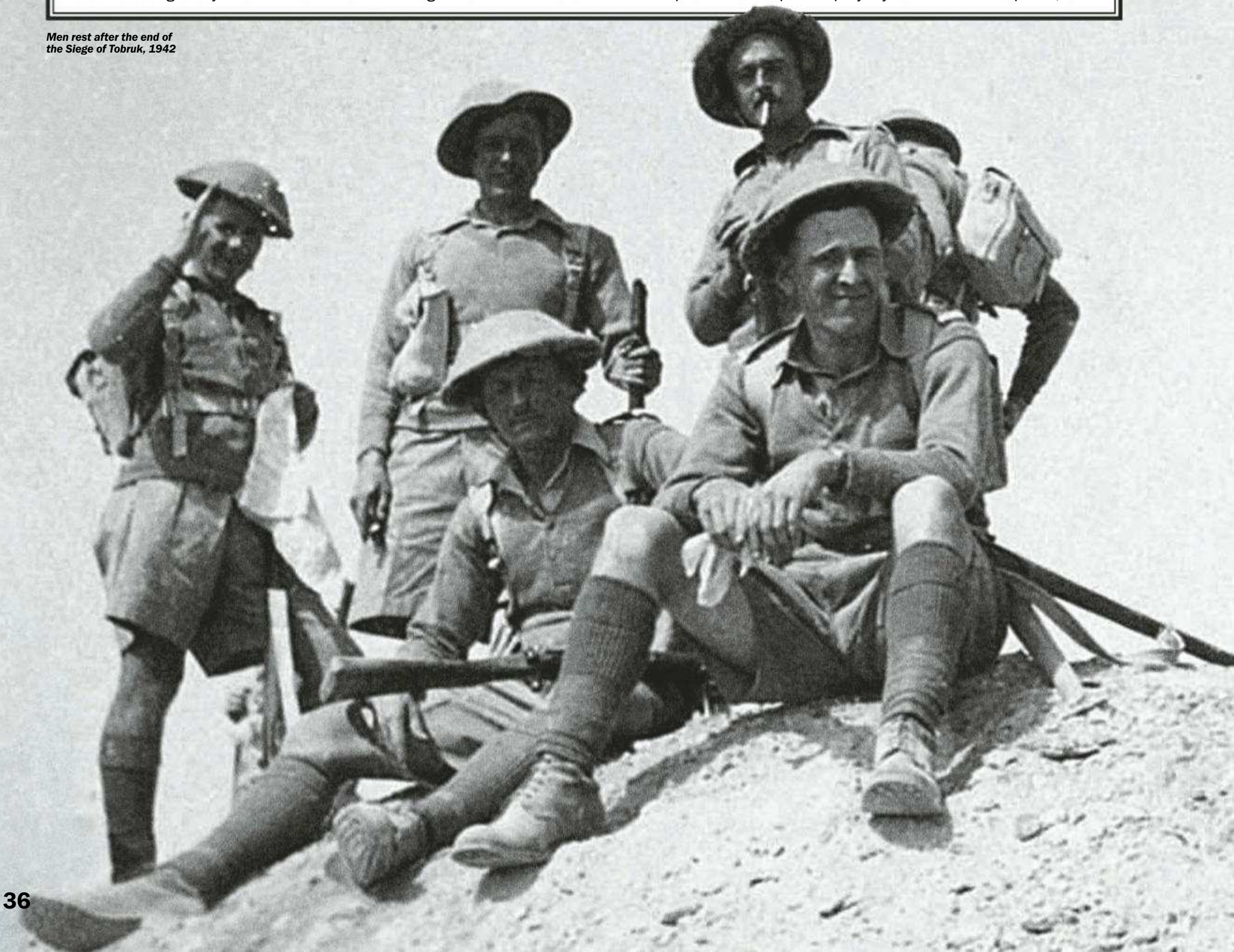
My father, Dennis, joined the Territorial Army before the start of World War II because he knew war was coming. He told me he had never believed Chamberlain's claims of "peace in our time". He chose to join the artillery. Memories of World War I were fresh enough to dampen enthusiasm for the infantry. He went to war a few months later, telling his mother he would be back in a couple of years. In fact he was to be away for five years.

Dennis was posted to North Africa and the Middle East and saw action in the last six major battles of the desert campaign. He was among the few to serve under Wavell in the early days and under Bernard Montgomery after that. He was at the siege of Tobruk from

beginning to end. His best friend was killed and he himself was captured, only to be freed by the British Army six days later. There was plenty of action.

However, this is not just a military story. It's the story of an ordinary young man of 21 who experienced extraordinary times. It tells of jokes and japes, horror and comradeship. It's a straightforward and unsentimental tale, intelligent and gently humorous, just like my father. My father rarely mentioned the war. However, in the mid 1990s he hand-wrote his memoir as a record for himself and our family. I publish the memoir now to share his story. His experiences were shared by many of his generation – experiences my generation has been spared and I hope and pray my children will be spared, too.

Men rest after the end of the Siege of Tobruk, 1942



"I entered 1941 at the Middle East Signal School. Course No. 14 was for both officers and NCOs and ran for six weeks, so at the end of it I felt I really knew my job. Maadi was at the end of 12 miles [19 kilometres] of electric railway running into Cairo city centre, so I was easily able to get into town in the evening or at weekends. The station was a mile or so from camp so, if possible, one got a taxi. Since taxis were scarce the drill was to jump on the running-board of one going in the right direction. On one occasion I even rode the whole way on the luggage grid. A bit tricky going round corners! The course contained Australians and New Zealanders, which added to the social side. By the time it had ended, the South Notts had left Matruh and handed in their guns.

"It must have been at this time the Army apparently thought my regiment was up the desert because I was put on a very small ship in Alexandria which slowly chugged its way up the 800 miles [1,285 kilometres] of coast to Tobruk. There I tasted, for the first time, the terribly salty Tobruk water and thought the cooks had made a mistake and used sea water for the tea. After a day or two in a transit camp, my proper destination was discovered and I joined the same ship to chug all the way back again, this time with the holds full of hundreds of Italian prisoners. I finally found my way to the regiment...

"On 3rd April orders suddenly came to return to the Western Desert. We had already been equipped with 25-pounders but now stores poured in. Other units were ordered to give the South Notts anything they wanted. News of Rommel's attack 1,500 miles [2,415 kilometres] away had become common knowledge and on 5th April we set off westwards. We bivouacked the first night at Mena Camp, a few miles north of Cairo. Pete Birkin the battery commander came round and let it be known that the military police in Cairo had been requested to be kind, on this our last night before going up to meet Rommel, and trucks were laid on to take us into town...

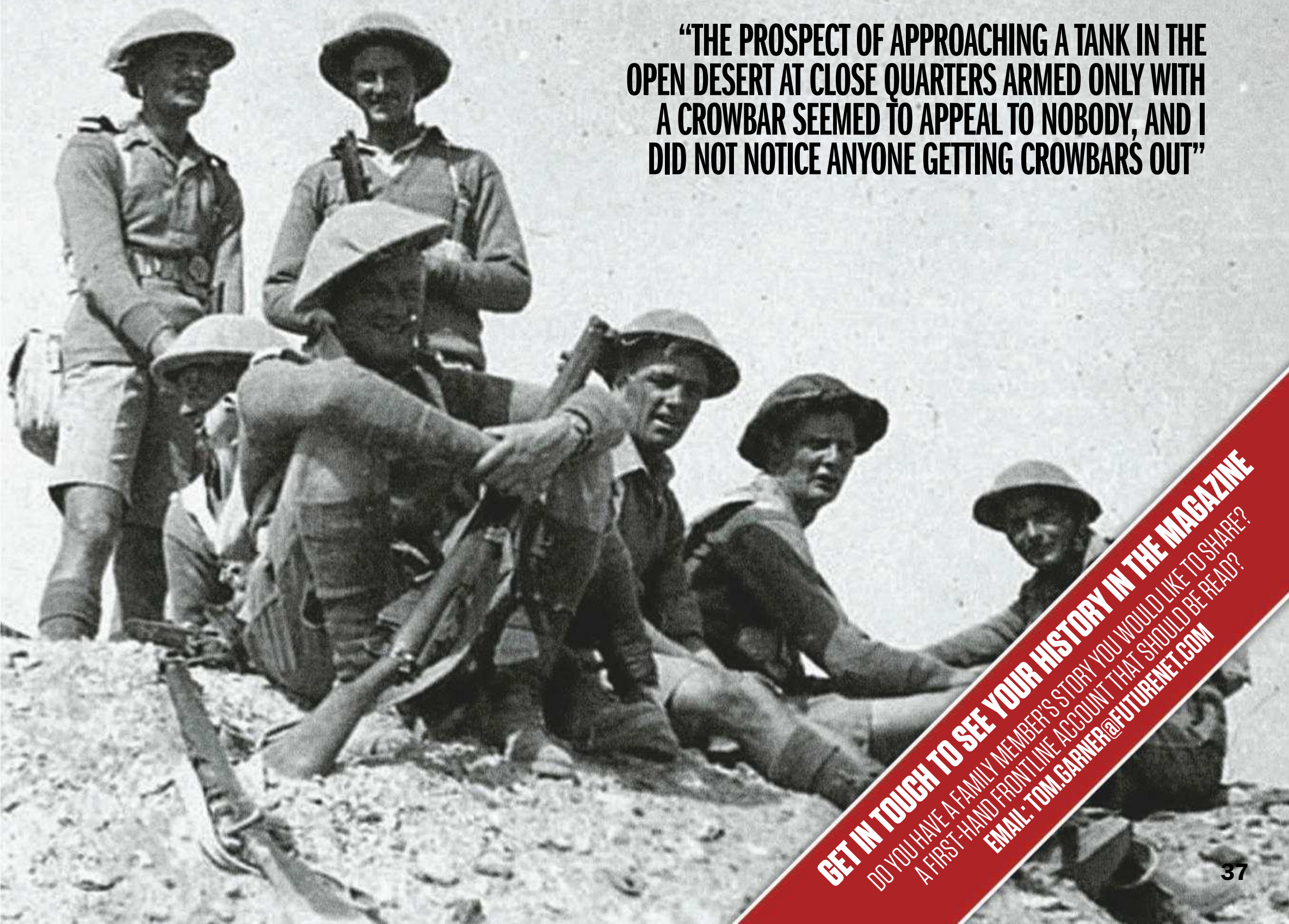
"On Sunday morning we set off westwards up the potholed coast road, and on Tuesday reached Sidi Barrani. It had almost 50 mud huts, and here was where Mussolini had earlier reported the trains were running again. As the convoy was passing Buq Buq, despatch riders rode down the column showing boards on which were chalked the words, 'close right up' and 'drive as fast as possible'. It appeared orders had just been received to get to Tobruk as quickly as possible, and we were told, 'There have been German tanks between here and Tobruk this morning.' We were the only vehicles going west, streams of traffic were travelling in the other direction. We wound up the escarpment to Fort Capuzzo and the wire...

"It was a terribly difficult journey being towed in pitch darkness, and I had to keep on glancing to the side to relieve the strain on my eyes. As we approached Tobruk we could hear bombing and shelling from 20 miles [32 kilometres] away, and at last we crossed the perimeter fence long after midnight. Soon after, barbed wire was drawn across the road and the last belt of mines was laid. We still did not pull up until the column met a crowd of vehicles and guns coming from the opposite direction. Three regiments met at a crossroads and stayed there until morning.

"Morning dawned with a blinding sandstorm and there was immediately an alarm that we were about to be attacked by tanks. The wagon line officer, Lieutenant Newman, obviously inspired by exploits in the Spanish Civil War, passed down the line of vehicles saying in his rather squeaky country voice, 'When the tanks come, stick the crowbars in their tracks...' The prospect of approaching a tank in the open desert at close quarters armed only with a crowbar seemed to appeal to nobody, and I did not notice anyone getting crowbars out. Fortunately at midday the flap was over and our guns went into position two or three miles [3.2-4.8 kilometres] south of the crossroads.

"The defended area at Tobruk was larger than people imagine. The perimeter wire ran in a half-circle for about 30 miles [48

"THE PROSPECT OF APPROACHING A TANK IN THE OPEN DESERT AT CLOSE QUARTERS ARMED ONLY WITH A CROWBAR SEEMED TO APPEAL TO NOBODY, AND I DID NOT NOTICE ANYONE GETTING CROWBARS OUT"



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From left to right, Peter Surfleet, George Pearson, Bob Foulds, DGM, Dennis Middleton and Bill Williams pictured after being promoted in Cairo, July 1942

kilometres] from coast to coast, with the town and harbour in the centre, on the shore, of course. Outside the wire was an old anti-tank ditch, and inside was a concrete defensive post with underground shelters every half-mile or so. These posts were numbered from the west. Because there was virtually no variation in height near the wire there were several steel observation posts and towers. The posts comprised a small crow's nest at a height of about 15 feet [4.5 metres]: the towers were much larger and higher, perhaps 50 feet [15 metres], with the ladder concealed behind a roll of scrim (open fabric). Some observing officers used them, some found somewhere on the ground, but they looked, and were, terribly vulnerable. Glad to say, I never sat on top of one, like a coconut on a shy.

"We were one of four Royal Horse Artillery regiments – two regular, two yeomanry, and a field regiment. The infantry were the 9th Australian Division, and there were a few odds and ends.

"It was now Good Friday, 10th April, and shelling had been exchanged for 24 hours. At 3pm an attack came in on our left from enemy tanks which broke through the wire, but at dusk they withdrew after eight had been knocked out by fire from the whole regiment. It must have been about then I was manning an observation post in a shallow slit trench near point 29 with Lieutenant Timms. It was an exciting exercise trying to direct fire on to enemy vehicles and guns, but terribly difficult through the mirage seen through binoculars, and blowing sand. It was Timms's first time at an observation post (mine too, but he didn't know that) so most of the orders were given by Bombardier Middleton.

"Next day some enemy infantry had obviously got into the anti-tank ditch, and if I popped my head up for air a rifle shot would be fired with the bullet zinging close by. If I had to get out of the trench and go back to our vehicle down by the hill it was a matter of running the gauntlet. The Northumberland Fusiliers, machine gunners, were also behind the hill and we got them to silence the enemy riflemen. They were firing over our heads (like artillery) but the trajectory was terribly close to us and some shots hit the ground very near us and

ricocheted on, so we had to stop them. We spent 48 hours at this observation point, which meant I went for three nights without sleep, and when we were relieved I was so tired while waiting for the truck that I lay down on the ground and went straight to sleep...

"It was now Easter Sunday. On the gun position, the information coming down from Lieutenant Bennet at his observation point was relayed to us. Our telephone lines had been cut but the infantry line was still working and orders came to our troop through the two headquarters. He was with the Aussie infantry in point 32 when the German infantry broke through the wire and German tanks were all around him in his Bren carrier. He described the Jerries using flame throwers, and they were so close that he gave the order 'Target ME – fire!' The gun position officer's assistants feverishly worked out his exact position and the guns fired.

"The Aussies stayed in their trenches, the observation post party kept their heads down in the corner, and the German infantry were cut up and chased from the gap in the wire. The enemy tanks went on. While all this was happening, a terrific air battle was in progress with 15 Germans brought down for the loss of three of our Hurricanes. The sight of a plane diving vertically to earth became commonplace Easter Sunday! Artillery duels continued.

"I accompanied an officer to an observation post in front of a small mound near the wire where we were completely overlooked by the enemy. We did a bit of shooting and then enemy shells bracketed our observation post. We were in a slit trench about three feet [0.9 metres] deep, two of us, with our driver and

"IT WAS AN EXCITING EXERCISE TRYING TO DIRECT FIRE ON TO ENEMY VEHICLES AND GUNS, BUT TERRIBLY DIFFICULT THROUGH THE MIRAGE SEEN THROUGH BINOCULARS & BLOWING SAND"

the truck in a mere scrape behind the mound. The enemy quickly got the exact range, then plastered us continually for 20 minutes. I suppose between one and two hundred rounds were fired, then they stopped, obviously thinking we were knocked out.

"In front, at one point, a spent splinter had hit me on the cheek, but barely drew blood, and one or two shells had landed on the very edge of the trench. I must admit I felt our survival was miraculous. When we were certain the shelling had stopped we nipped round the back of the mound, expecting to find our driver dead. But no, despite his only being in a scrape he was right as rain. However, our observation post was obviously untenable, so we got in our truck and moved.

"As April went on Stukas were active daily over the town and harbour, which we were able to watch with equanimity from a few miles away. Then one day they suddenly turned their attention to the gun line of 425 Battery. I was up at the observation post, saw the raid from a distance, and returned to hear with foreboding that three senior NCOs had been killed. One was BSM Smedley, a sergeant major of only 21, and yes, one was Phil Collihole. I collected his steel helmet, which had a jagged splinter hole in the back.

"We had been very close since the war started, and up to a fortnight before when the battle began we had been able to exchange a few flippant remarks every day. His death left a big gap, and I wrote to his wife as soon as I could. However, there was no time for this now: I was promptly promoted to lance-sergeant and put in his place in charge of battery signals. After this raid Lord Haw Haw [William Joyce] announced over German radio, 'All guns in the Palestine area of Tobruk have been knocked out,' but in fact Battery 425 was very much in action. My 23rd birthday passed unnoticed.

"When the battle had started 11 Hurricane fighters had been left for the defence of Tobruk fortress. Every day we saw one or more shot down, and every day fewer and fewer were able to scramble. Towards the end of April just one was left, and I saw him plummet from 10,000 feet [3,050 metres] to crash into the ground a few hundred yards away. He was

Flying Officer Lamb, a Canadian. Earlier I saw a German plane hit and the pilot descending by parachute. We watched him land and said, 'Let's go and do him in.' We grabbed rifles and actually jumped into a truck. But after a few minutes sanity prevailed, and we left him for someone else to pick up.

"On 30th April the Germans made another attack, broke through the wire and captured several posts, thereby establishing a salient within the perimeter, which they retained throughout the siege. Our counterattack was unsuccessful. So ended three weeks of battle, a very wearing experience. The Germans retained their salient but got no further, and things quietened for some weeks, except for nightly bombing..."

"In June there was a relief attempt from the frontier. It failed. This was disappointing. About this time a third troop was formed with old 1914 howitzers taken from the 51st Field. It was christened Glamour Troop, after Ian Sinclair commanding it. I laid a phone line to it which was always thereafter called the Glamour Line. Since I extended it to A&B troop observation posts, it duplicated the posts' ordinary lines, forming a belt and braces job. It was thus very useful when the cry came from a battery telephone exchange, 'a troop's line's gone!'. If I felt it was a difficult assignment I would go myself, taking another man with me.

"Usually it involved walking up the line, plugging in with a field telephone at intervals to make sure we hadn't missed the break. Often it had broken because of shellfire: sometimes because a tank had crossed it. Sometimes it ran across a minefield but, fortunately, this didn't matter very much because many were old enemy anti-tank mines and, in any case, the sand usually looked slightly different where the mines had been sunk (though not visible at night)..."

"The water ration was half a gallon [2.3 litres] per man per day. This provided a pint [0.6-litre] mug of tea at breakfast, dinner and tea which used three pints: the cookhouse kept half a pint per man for cooking and washing utensils: and each man had one pint for his water bottle every other day. There was thus nothing for washing either oneself or one's clothes. The water too was salty, nearly as salty as seawater, so the tea was nothing like you have ever tasted..."

"Food was monotonous to a degree. Sometimes there was no bread, and we had biscuits. Usually there was bread, but because the flour was thick with weevils the bread had lots of little black bits in – dried weevils. Not that it mattered – one couldn't taste them. The other staple was bully beef, sometimes MV (meat and vegetable in theory but actually pretty disgusting). So the menu every day was like this, for over eight months:

- Breakfast: Biscuit porridge and tinned bacon boiled in the tin, making it soggy and greasy.
- Dinner: Bully stew or MV.
- Tea: Pilchards or jam.
- A pint of tea with each meal.

"Just occasionally there was a tin of fruit. I remember to this day that a tin of pineapple was the ration for eight men, and contained 44 pieces. I carefully dished it out at five and a half per man. And I have never eaten a pilchard since! Nevertheless, to get a meal under one's

"I RAN, SEEING THE LINE OF BULLETS KICKING UP THE SAND AND APPROACHING AT A TREMENDOUS RATE. I MADE IT WITH A SECOND TO SPARE"

belt was a great thing: one was then ready for whatever might befall, and I retained this feeling for many years.

"I used to control the cigarette ration of 50 a week. To help make them last, two or three men would give me their ration to keep, and would ask for cigarettes as they wanted them. They knew I only smoked 30 to 40 a week and they ran no risk of me being tempted by theirs.

"By August we were rationed to 10 rounds per gun per day, which only provided for a few minutes' firing at dawn and dusk, and although during the period of the siege the Germans would think up some attack every few weeks, there were long periods of quietness. During one such period, since leave was impossible, a rest camp was established where I spent three days. We would take a truck and go for a swim in the afternoon, but apart from that there was nothing to do, and I lay all day on my bed (i.e. my blankets on the ground). The inactivity made me feel ill, and I was glad to get back to work.

"However, we did entertain ourselves. Battery HQ was in a large cave, where we had periodical concerts. We had what would later be called a skiffle group, who included Driver Walker slapping a homemade double bass made out of a packing case and wire (when I next saw him 25 years after the war it was as chairman of a public company!) Many people used to sing, but particularly enthusiastic were the cries for a particular gunner to sing *Mexicali Rose*, which he did in a falsetto voice..."

"Some time in autumn, surprisingly, we began to receive a daily rum ration. Geoff Douglas, a battery clerk, decided very sensibly that while one tot of rum was not much good to anyone, if we saved it up for one week we could have a party. We rewardingly formed the Saturday Club, whereby each Saturday evening four or five of us played auction bridge, which we had just learned, and drank rum. This went very satisfactorily for two or three weeks, and a Saturday then came when we had saved a lot of rum. At the end of this evening we came out of the sandbagged dugout half cut to find Major Peter Birkin outside, absolutely furious. As I told him, I had made proper provision for the manning of the telephone exchange, there was no barrage planned, and so on, but he was unappeased. Next morning we lined up before him, and he said fiercely that unfortunately we were his senior NCOs and he could not possibly do without us in action, otherwise we should have been up before the colonel. So I was unexpectedly saved..."

"At the end of August most of the Australians were relieved, and replaced by Poles and some British infantry: we were supporting the Polish Brigade. They were charming and brave people – as effective in their frequent night patrols outside the wire as the Aussies had been.

"They were much taken aback by the water situation: in the first place they used a week's supply in three days and had to be given extra, which annoyed me intensely. Secondly, they could hardly credit the taste: some tried to improve it with jam, but without success.

"Actually, although we did not know it at the time, only five units saw the siege through from end to end. The South Notts was one. An Aussie infantry battalion was another: they were due for relief in October but could not get out before the full moon came round again.

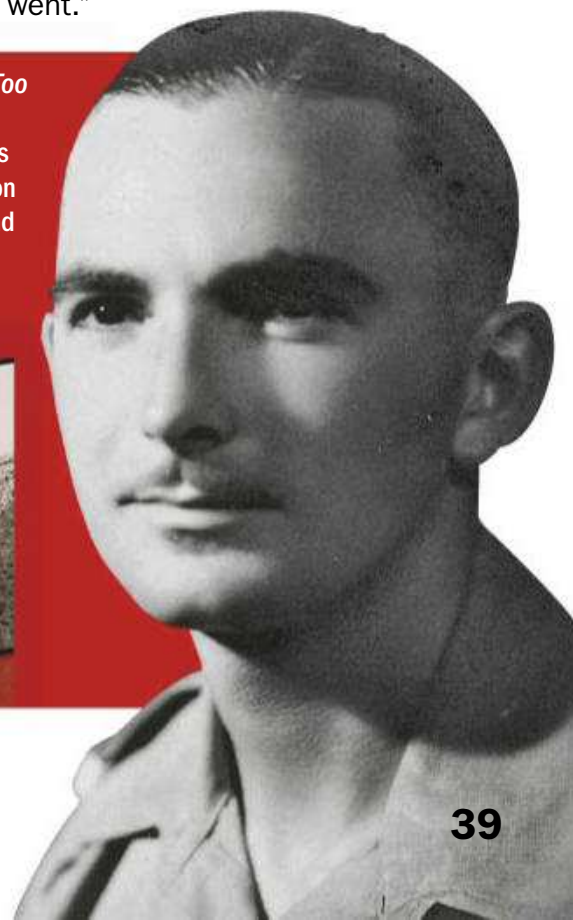
"There was always bombing of course, chiefly of the port but also on the gun positions and elsewhere. It was usually at night, during the fortnight of the moon, but also by daylight, since we had no fighters whatever, and anti-aircraft fire did not achieve much. I was once caught out in a daytime raid when I realised that a squadron of enemy bombers was heading direct for me with all machine guns blazing. They were terribly near and low and I had to decide in an instant whether to lie down or run 50 yards [45 metres] to the nearest dugout. I ran, seeing the line of bullets kicking up the sand and approaching at a tremendous rate. I made it with a second to spare.

"One night the old Italian ammunition dump was hit. It was little loss to us though we did use a few old Italian guns as what we called Bush Troop, and the ammo went on burning and exploding for hour after hour, providing the most spectacular firework I have seen, for 24 hours.

"By this time we had picked up a great deal of old Indian Army language, chiefly Urdu, to which we had added many Arabic words, so the 8th Army's conversation was quite distinctive.

"November was bitterly cold and we had changed back into battle dress. We knew the breakout would soon come and all NCOs had the plan of attack explained. We were to break out and join up with the rest of the 8th Army coming up from the Egyptian frontier. My job was to ensure the communications from Ops to guns, this time chiefly by wireless. On the 20th the code word was given, and at 6am next morning the Black Watch were lined up on the start line in the anti-tank ditch. My information came from Bombardier Keeton, who was in charge of the line-laying 15 cwt truck. It was completely unarmoured, although heavily sandbagged, but travelled with the first wave of tanks, immediately behind the infantry, laying out the line as it went."

Memoirs Of A Not Too Serious Hussar by Dennis Middleton is available on Amazon kindle for £9.95 and in hard copy from remembermedia.co.uk for £19.95





SURVIVING **STALAG LUFT III**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
AIR COMMODORE CHARLES CLARKE OBE**

This Bomber Command veteran was a witness to the legendary 'Great Escape' and lived through the infamous 'Long March' of Allied POWs through Germany

*German guards
keeping a close watch
over Allied POWs from
a tower in 1943*

Inset, right: Clarke photographed shortly after the war. He remained in the RAF and went on to serve in Palestine and during the Aden Emergency



WORDS TOM GARNER

Apart from Colditz Castle, no other prisoner-of-war camp of World War II captures the public imagination quite like Stalag Luft III: a vast complex of wooden huts, compounds, barbed wire and guard towers. The camp became most famous for the mass breakout that occurred on 24-25 March 1944 when dozens of Allied POWs escaped through a tunnel. This event later became the stuff of cinematic legend, but for those who were held captive in Stalag Luft III the actual experience of being a POW was a hard endurance test of almost continual suffering.

One of those who survived was Charles Clarke, who was then a teenage pilot officer in RAF 619 Squadron. Now a retired air commodore, Clarke is one of the few men still alive who not only witnessed the 'Great Escape' but also survived a little-known but horrendous forced march through central Europe that killed many Allied prisoners of war, known as the 'Long March'. The following is a gritty endurance story where Hollywood myth collides with the grim but courageous reality.

Joining the RAF

Clarke joined the RAF in 1941 and was a keen recruit. "The war was on and like other schoolboys I was enamoured with the Royal Air Force. I had flown when I was about eight in a De Havilland Dragon Rapide and came across the RAF in about 1937 when I went to a flying display at Hendon. I then volunteered in 1941."

However, Clarke's initial enthusiasm was dampened when he went to Oxford for his RAF examination. "We slept overnight in a cinema, and the chap in the bed next to me was a sergeant at the nearby airfield. He was on Wellingtons and told me about how many people they were losing, and it really made my hair stand on end. About a week or two later I saw the documentary film *Target For Tonight*, and it again showed how RAF losses were higher over Germany. I thought afterwards, 'Perhaps I'm not doing the right thing.'"

Although he was accepted into the RAF, Clarke's dawning awareness of the air force's dangers would prove to be justified. During WWII, 55,573 RAF personnel were killed flying with Bomber Command, which was a death rate of 44.4 per cent. Its prolonged bombing offensive against Nazi Germany was extremely destructive, and Clarke flew in the thick of it.

"FOR THOSE WHO WERE HELD CAPTIVE IN STALAG LUFT III, THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING A POW WAS A HARD ENDURANCE TEST OF ALMOST CONTINUAL SUFFERING"

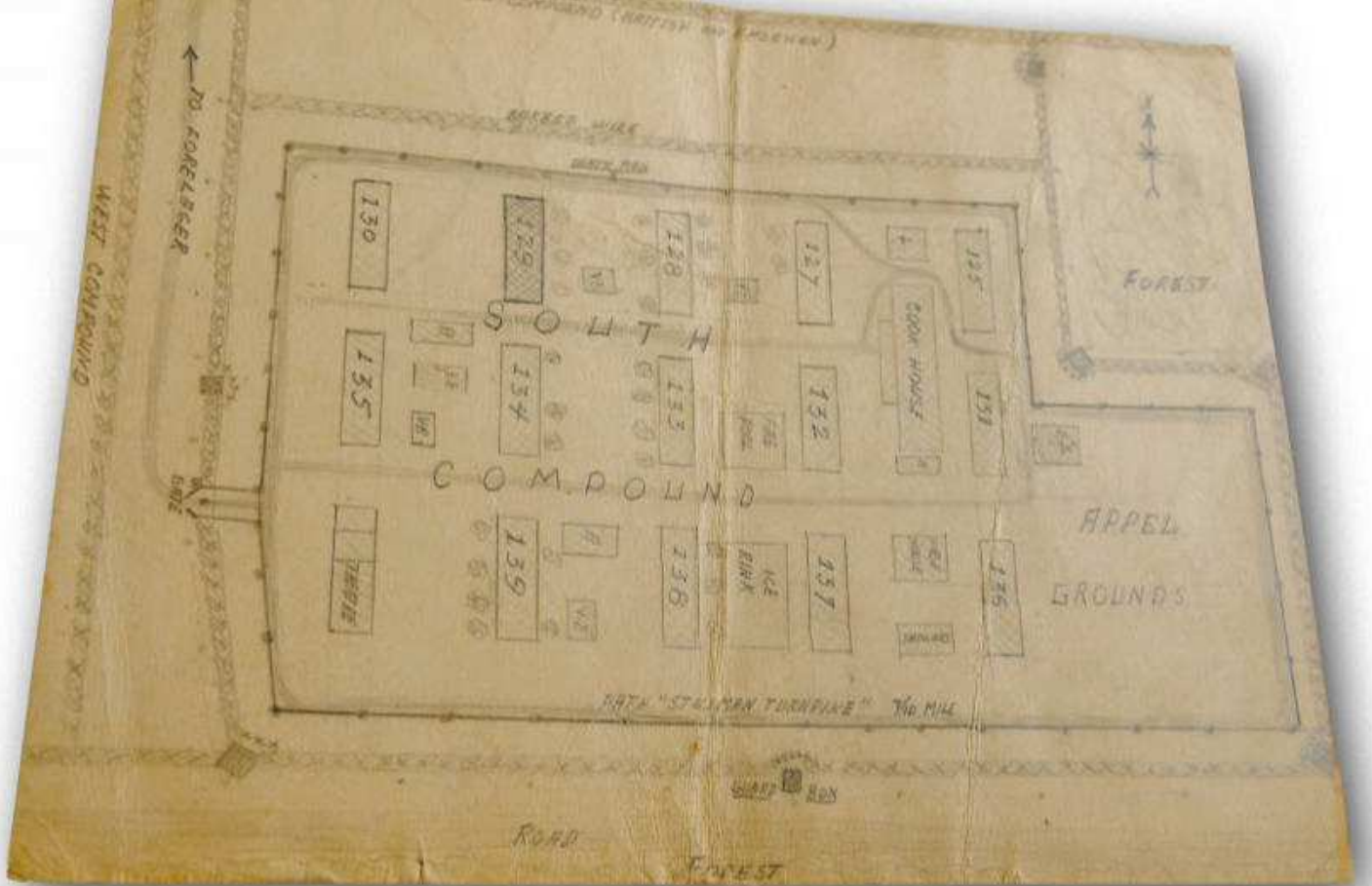
SURVIVING STALAG LUFT III

After being sworn in, Clarke went through an extended period of training across England before he was posted to learn skills such as navigation and Morse code. He had ambitions to become a pilot, but after initial flying training contracted mumps. "I was hospitalised for several weeks, and when I came back my course had finished so I was taken off flying training. I was told that I had to go into the pilot navigation bomb-aimer scheme, and it really upset me. I cried because I didn't want to be taken off the pilot's training course, but it probably saved my life."

Now assigned as a bomb-aimer, Clarke trained on Wellington medium bombers before moving onto the Avro Lancaster. His crewmembers were self-selected among themselves in a process that Clarke recalls as being similar to "a dating game. You virtually chose each other." Despite this unusual selection method, Clarke speaks fondly of his seven-man Lancaster crew: "There were never any problems. The navigator, pilot and myself were commissioned and the rest were sergeants. It's rather sad that whenever anyone talks about Bomber Command they speak in terms of officers, but people forget that two-thirds of the crews were NCOs."

Raids over Germany

Now commissioned as a pilot officer, Clarke and his crew were assigned to 619 Squadron at Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, although it was an unfortunate time to begin active service. "When I joined 619 Squadron the loss rate was very high because it was the peak of the Bomber Command offensive. People would go out and



you'd never see them again. It was amazing how efficiently their kit was removed afterwards."

Clarke flew 18 missions in a Lancaster bomber between 1943-44, including the Battle of Berlin. This extensive campaign against the German capital resulted in the loss of nearly 500 RAF aircraft and over 2,500 aircrew killed. Clarke flew six missions to Berlin and recalls that survival rates were very low: "It was a matter of luck whether you survived. You were on a long flight and were being attacked by enemy aircraft with a superior performance. They had better guns with a higher calibre and range. They had also been in flight for about an hour whereas we'd been up for around ten hours, so you were a sitting duck. If an enemy

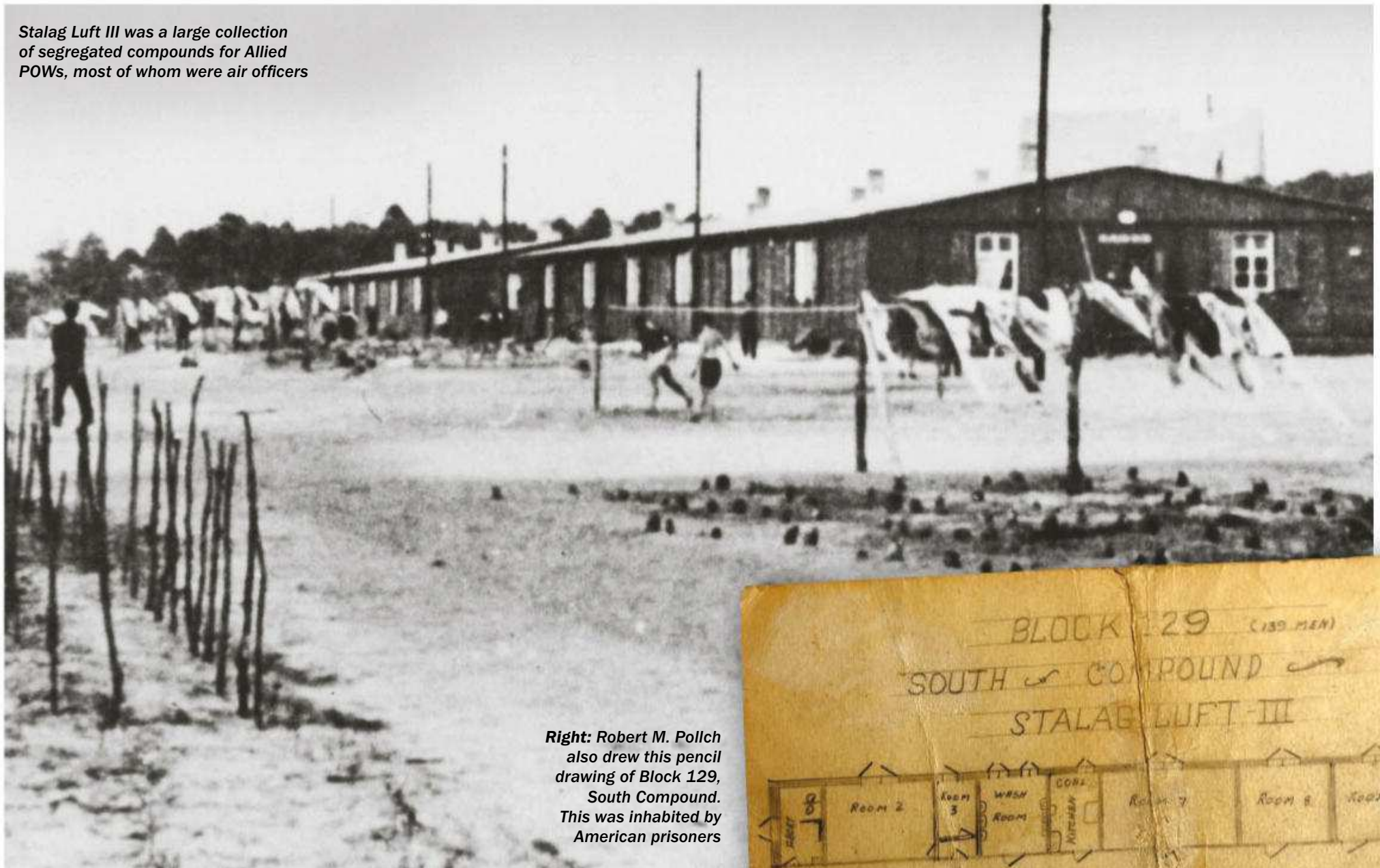
Above: The American South Compound of Stalag Luft III as drawn by US prisoner Lieutenant Robert M. Polich. The drawing depicts various huts, wire fences, guard towers and even an ice rink

fighter picked you up you'd almost certainly had it. There might have been a small percent chance of escaping, but it was very low. Ultimately, survivors were just lucky."

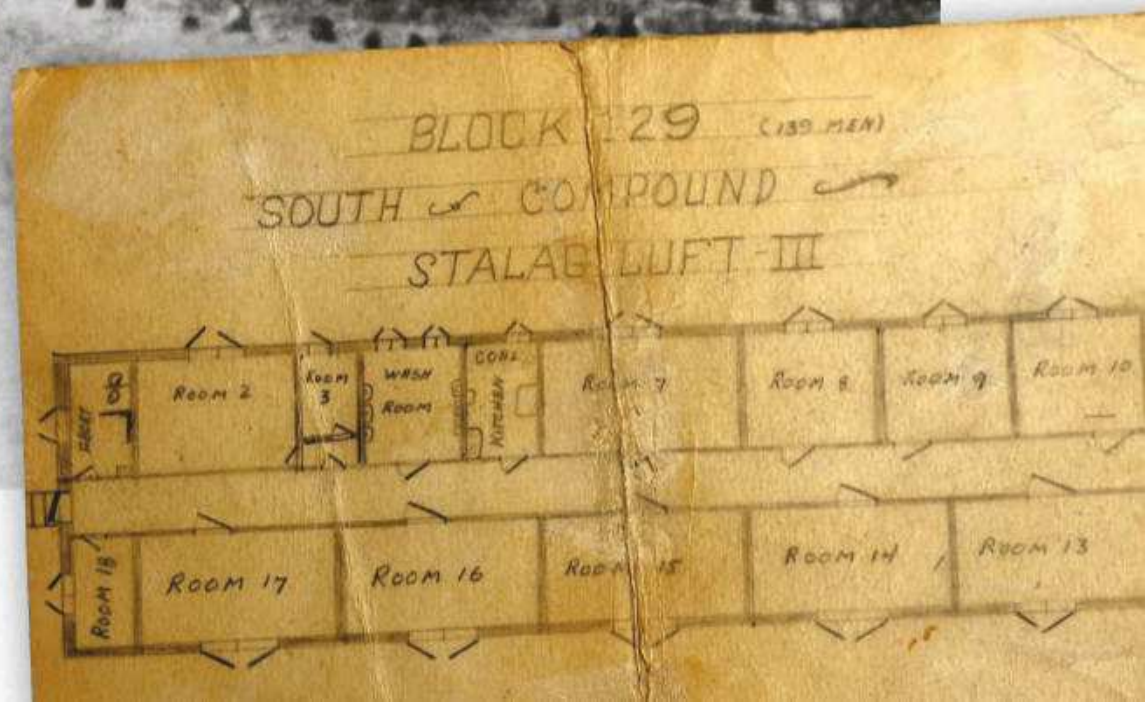
Capture

Clarke's own luck ran out in February 1944 when his Lancaster was shot down over Schweinfurt in Germany. "We were hit and the whole aircraft was on fire, with the wing coming off. I waited until it was obvious that we all had to get out and I bailed out."

Stalag Luft III was a large collection of segregated compounds for Allied POWs, most of whom were air officers



Right: Robert M. Polich also drew this pencil drawing of Block 29, South Compound. This was inhabited by American prisoners



619 SQUADRON

Charles Clarke's bombing unit was short lived, but it took part in notable operations and contained many decorated airmen

619 Squadron was active from 18 April 1943 until its disbandment on 18 July 1945. It was formed out of elements of 97 Squadron and was equipped with Avro Lancaster bomber aircraft. Although the squadron was based at Woodhall Spa, it had to move several times within Lincolnshire, including bases at Coningsby, Dunholme Lodge, Strubby and Skellingthorpe.

The squadron's main tasks were bombing operations over Germany, and its last mission involved attacking SS barracks at Berchtesgaden near Adolf Hitler's Alpine retreat. 619 Squadron also laid mines in Norway and participated in Operation Exodus, which repatriated Allied POWs.

Although it only existed for two years, 619 Squadron was mentioned ten times in dispatches, and its members were awarded 76 DFCs (Distinguished Flying Cross), 37 DFMs (Distinguished Flying Medal) and one DSO (Distinguished Service Order).

"THE SQUADRON'S MAIN TASKS WERE BOMBING OPERATIONS OVER GERMANY"



A navigator of 619 Squadron, Flying Officer P. Ingleby, surveys charts in his Lancaster at RAF Coningsby

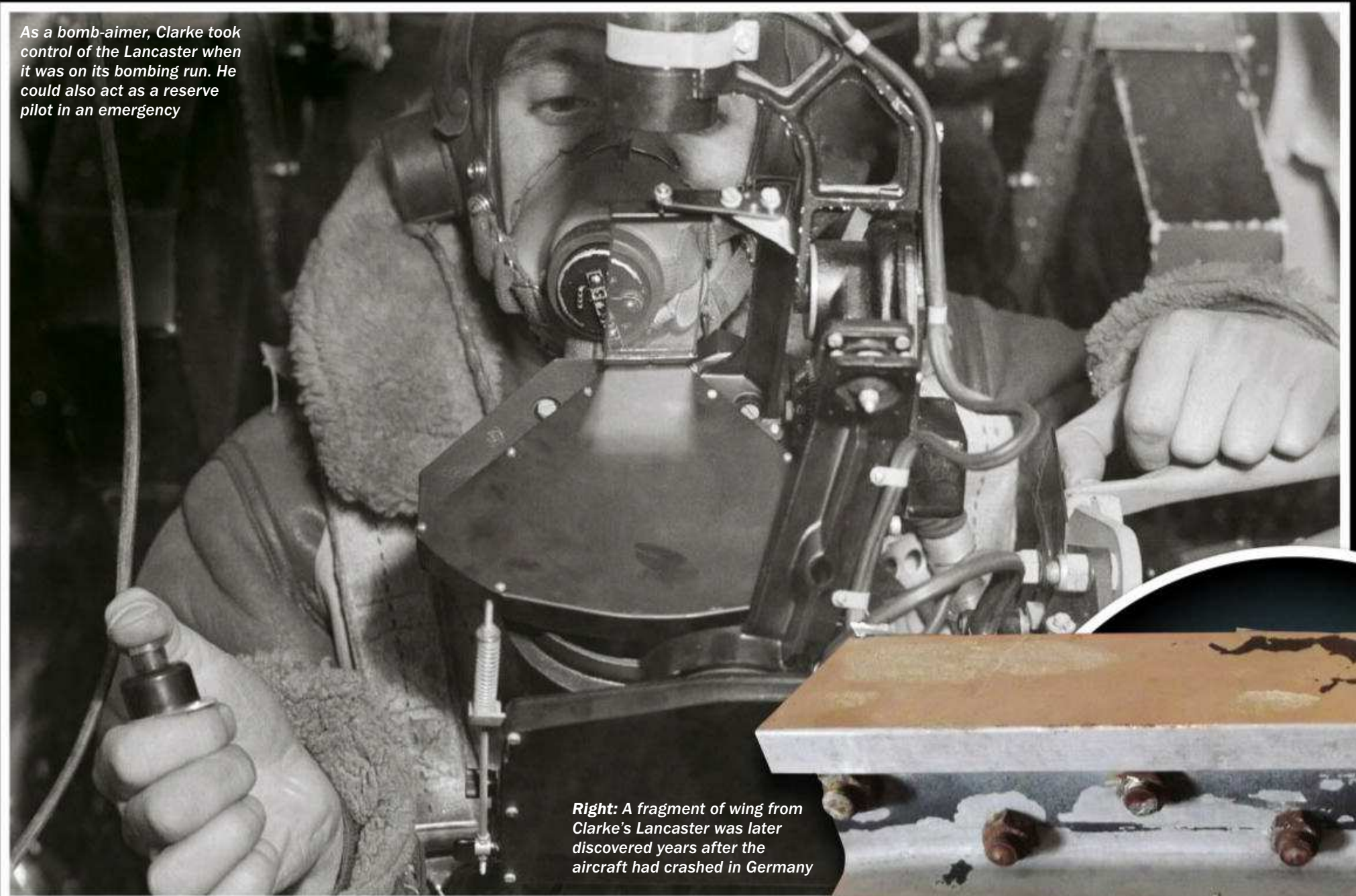


Clarke (top row, second from right) with his Lancaster crew in 619 Squadron. Three of these men were killed when their aircraft was shot down

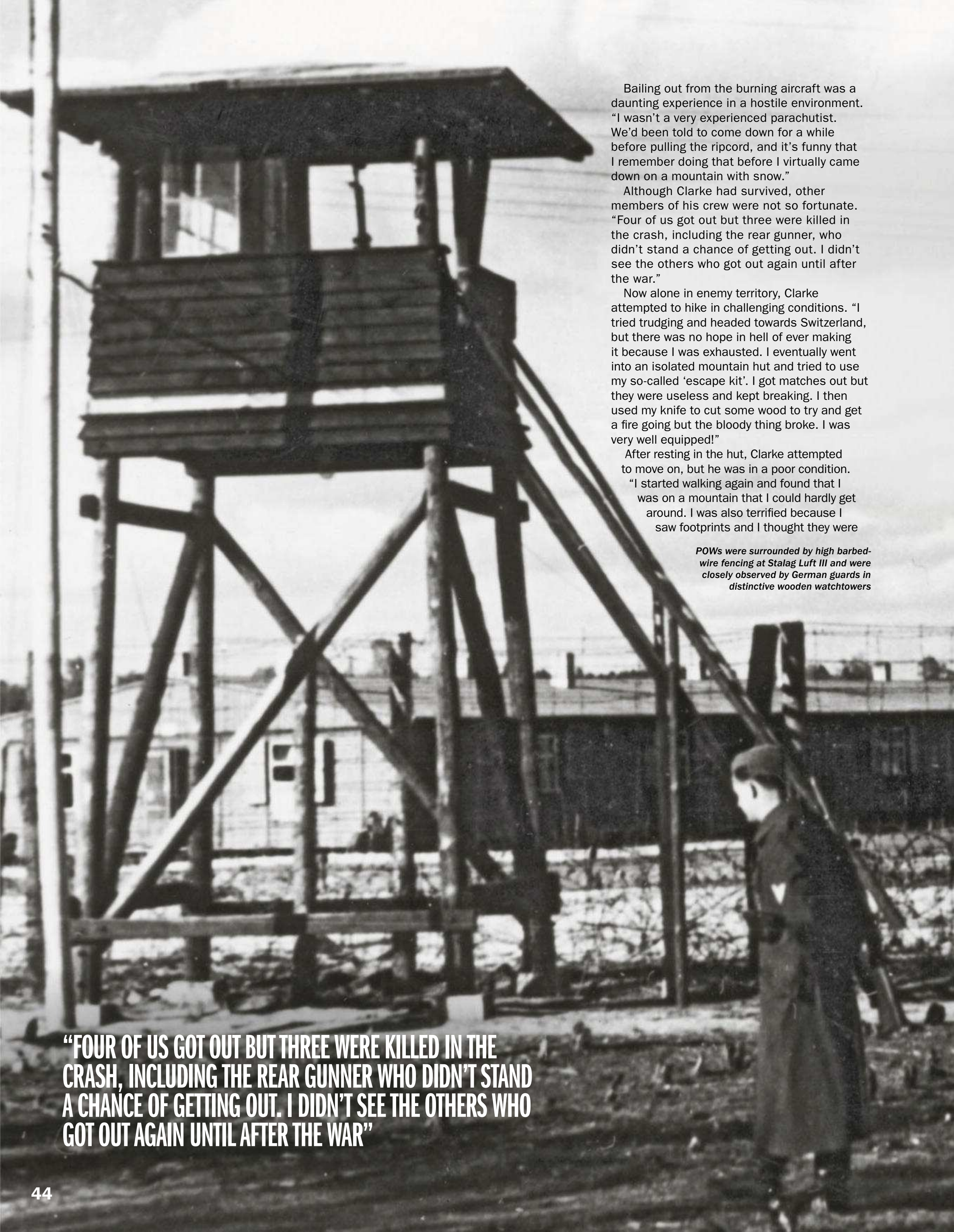


A Lancaster bomber of 619 Squadron. Clarke flew 18 missions in the squadron before his aircraft was shot down over Germany

As a bomb-aimer, Clarke took control of the Lancaster when it was on its bombing run. He could also act as a reserve pilot in an emergency



Right: A fragment of wing from Clarke's Lancaster was later discovered years after the aircraft had crashed in Germany



Bailing out from the burning aircraft was a daunting experience in a hostile environment. "I wasn't a very experienced parachutist. We'd been told to come down for a while before pulling the ripcord, and it's funny that I remember doing that before I virtually came down on a mountain with snow."

Although Clarke had survived, other members of his crew were not so fortunate. "Four of us got out but three were killed in the crash, including the rear gunner, who didn't stand a chance of getting out. I didn't see the others who got out again until after the war."

Now alone in enemy territory, Clarke attempted to hike in challenging conditions. "I tried trudging and headed towards Switzerland, but there was no hope in hell of ever making it because I was exhausted. I eventually went into an isolated mountain hut and tried to use my so-called 'escape kit'. I got matches out but they were useless and kept breaking. I then used my knife to cut some wood to try and get a fire going but the bloody thing broke. I was very well equipped!"

After resting in the hut, Clarke attempted to move on, but he was in a poor condition.

"I started walking again and found that I was on a mountain that I could hardly get around. I was also terrified because I saw footprints and I thought they were

POWs were surrounded by high barbed-wire fencing at Stalag Luft III and were closely observed by German guards in distinctive wooden watchtowers

"FOUR OF US GOT OUT BUT THREE WERE KILLED IN THE CRASH, INCLUDING THE REAR GUNNER WHO DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT. I DIDN'T SEE THE OTHERS WHO GOT OUT AGAIN UNTIL AFTER THE WAR"

wolves. Now I realise they were just mountain goats, but it shows the state I was in.”

Clarke eventually found a way off the mountain and got onto a road alongside a frozen river, where he was captured. “I came down and saw some German soldiers, but they were not looking for me, they were looking for an American crew that had come down later. I thought I would run across the frozen river but they fired, and for me the war was over. The Germans couldn’t believe how young I was because I had only just turned 19. I looked young and you could almost hear them saying, “They’ve got children flying!”

After his capture, Clarke was imprisoned. “I was taken to a place that was more of a police station than a prison and put in solitary confinement. I shouted out, hoping to hear from the other three crewmembers that had been shot down, but the Germans eventually told me to shut up in a very harsh tone. I then started singing. I’d been to a theatre in London about a week before to see a show, and the main song was *Don’t Get Around Much Anymore*. I started singing that and I’m sure I got an answer!”

Clarke was then transferred to an airfield, where he was almost killed. “I remember being taken to a guardroom where there was a German NCO and two airmen. Suddenly there was a shot and a bullet ricocheted. I thought the man had tried to kill me and I swore at him, but the gun was torn off him.”

Conditions only got worse for Clarke as he was moved between several locations, including Dulag Luft, which was a POW

“THE STATION WAS CROWDED, AND I THINK THEY WANTED TO LYNCH ME. I WAS VERY GLAD TO HAVE THE PROTECTION OF THE LUFTWAFFE AIRMEN”

interrogation centre for captured aircrew. “We were put in a very small room with one little window. I was interrogated and asked for my number, rank and name etc. I don’t know how many days I was there for because you were just in this bloody small box the whole time. Then I was eventually taken out with an escort of three Germans to a station with a very big town nearby.”

At the station Clarke was subjected to the fury of local townspeople. “The station was crowded and I think they wanted to lynch me. I was very glad to have the protection of the Luftwaffe airmen. We got on a train and they turfed people out of a compartment before I was taken to Sagan.”

Sagan (now Zagan in Poland) was a fateful location for Clarke because the Silesian town was not far from his ultimate destination: Stalag Luft III.

The ‘big breakout’

Officially known as ‘Stammlager Luft III’, the famous POW camp was run by the Luftwaffe

and primarily held captured Allied air officers. Opened in March 1942, the camp consisted of several compounds where Allied nationalities were separated. British and Commonwealth airmen (of both the RAF and Fleet Air Arm) were imprisoned in North Compound while South Compound was opened for US personnel in September 1943. Although commissioned officers made up the bulk of the prisoners, there were extended compounds for NCOs, and non-airmen were also occasionally held.

Each compound consisted of 15 single-storey huts that could sleep around 15 men per room in five triple-deck bunks. Stalag Luft III eventually grew to 60 acres and was the home of 2,500 British air officers, 7,500 from the US Army Air Force and approximately 900 officers from other Allied air forces.

It was into this large camp that Clarke arrived, but before he could settle in he was subjected to one last interrogation. “When we got there we were interrogated (although ‘questioned’ is probably a better word) by our own people. This was because they were afraid of people infiltrating [the POWs], and I was thrust into a room of 12-16 other people.”

The ‘infiltration’ that the more experienced POW officers were worried about was a security concern, because when Clarke arrived deep progress was being made on preparations for a mass breakout. Three tunnels had been constructed, but only one had been successfully completed. The preparations were detailed, and Clarke had arrived just in time to be a witness to the ‘Great Escape’.



Right: Clarke’s POW tag from Stalag Luft III. “Oflag Luft” was the shortened version of “Offizier Lager”, and Clarke’s RAF Volunteer Reserve badge is also attached

Clarke soon became aware of the plan. “We quickly knew that there was going to be a big breakout, and the security was remarkably good.” Nevertheless, Clarke had arrived late and at 19 was deemed too young to take a prominent part in preparations. “I met the inner circle but didn’t know them well. I was a new boy – and I emphasise the word ‘boy’ rather than a man. All of the planning had been going on for years. Most of the people who went through the tunnel had been prisoners of war for at least a year.”

Despite not being given a place in the tunnel, Clarke still played a small part in the security for the escape. “I acted as a ‘stooge’, which was a guard or sentry. One of the things was that they had people scattered throughout the camp who used signals. For example, if you stood up it meant that there was a ‘Goon’ [German guard] nearby. It was all low-key stuff.”

When everything was prepared, the escapees waited for the best time to break out, which was the moonless night of 24-25 March 1944. 200 Allied POWs lined up to escape from the tunnel, although there were no Americans, as Clarke explains: “People often ask why there were no Americans in the camp but the answer is very simple. In the weeks before the Great Escape the Americans had been moved to a new US

“WE WERE KEPT OUT IN THE SNOW VIRTUALLY ALL DAY THE FOLLOWING DAY WHILE THEY COUNTED AND RECOUNTED US”

camp. We were in North Camp, and the move saved their lives of course.”

The night of the escape featured an Allied air raid nearby. Clarke recalls the escapees’ progress: “Before the air raid there were movements of people within the huts, and it was all done quietly. Those who were going through the tunnel got into Hut 104 so that they could be the first away.” Clarke also remembers when the Germans discovered the escape: “When the lights came on after the air raid had finished the escape became obvious to the Germans. We heard a shot and we knew the game was up.”

The escape has since become the subject of many myths, and the incident involving the German gunshot is one that Clarke is keen to clarify: “You hear lots of nonsense. I’ve heard one chap say, ‘I was in the tunnel when they fired the shot. Fortunately there was a curve in the tunnel otherwise I would have been killed.’

That was absolute rubbish: your head had to be straight so you could pull the trolleys along. Also, the shot that was fired was above ground, and the guard had fired a warning shot.”

Despite several setbacks, 76 Allied POWs had successfully escaped. Clarke recalls that the Germans’ immediate response was severe: “We were kept out in the snow virtually all day the following day while they counted and recounted us. They got no help from us because we kept moving around to confuse them. This went on for several days, and they stopped all rations and lots of other things. We were subjected to harsher treatment after the escape and there was also a huge manhunt.”

Eventually, the prisoners learned the awful fate of the escapees. “There were many more searches, and then of course the news came back to the camp commandant that 50 had been murdered. He called the British senior officer in and told him that 50 had been shot escaping. Fortunately, that officer was due to be repatriated the following week due to a gammy leg so he was able to report directly to parliament. It was then that [Foreign Secretary] Anthony Eden said that justice would be asserted.”

Although the escape was audacious, Clarke recounts the bleak statistics: “Eventually, two or three escapees came back to the camp, which

INSIDE THE GREAT ESCAPE

The breakout of March 1944 was meticulously prepared and involved three tunnels, hundreds of prisoners and vast amounts of improvisation

In early 1943, Squadron Leader Roger Bushell devised an audacious plan for a mass breakout from Stalag Luft III. Bushell was the head of the camp’s escape committee and proposed building three tunnels simultaneously so that 200 men could break out in a single attempt.

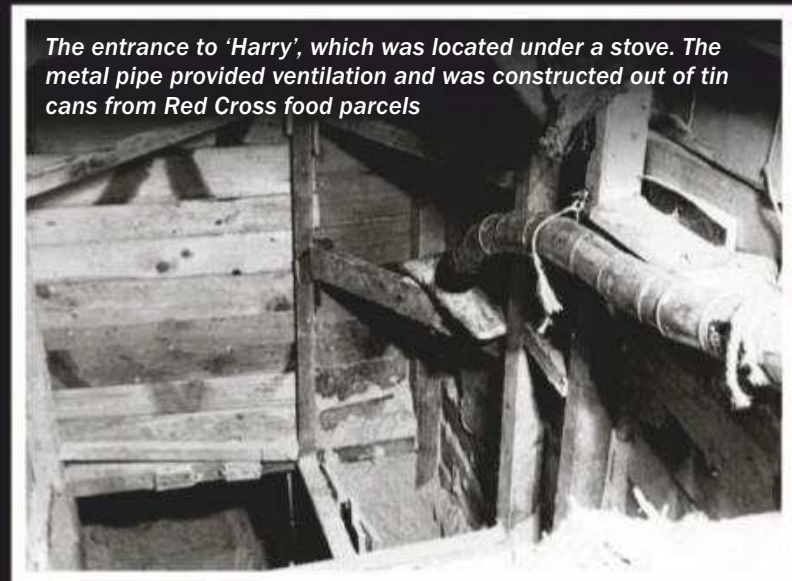
The tunnels were codenamed ‘Tom’, ‘Dick’ and ‘Harry’ and over 600 prisoners eventually became involved in their construction. Located at a depth of nine metres (30 feet) and designed to run more than 90 metres (300 feet) into the outside woods, the tunnels were certainly ambitious. However, at only 0.9 square metres (two square feet) in size, they were extremely small, and working underground in sandy subsoil required great courage and ingenuity.

Bed boards were used en masse to prop up the tunnels; candles were made from worn clothing and soup fat, while tin cans could be turned into tools or ventilation ducting. As progress continued, the tunnels became more elaborate. Electric lights were installed and hooked into the camp’s power grid, while most famously a small rail system was developed. Rope-pulled wooden trolleys were essential in removing tons of soil over 12 months, and

they even had stopping points that prisoners nicknamed ‘Piccadilly Circus’ and ‘Leicester Square’ after London Underground stations.

Escape preparations were not just confined to tunnelling. Skilled forgers made maps, false documents, compasses and civilian clothes while dispersers scattered the tunnels’ soil around the camp using hidden pouches in their trousers. All of these operations were also covered by an excellent security system. Prisoners became highly adept at distracting the German guards or acting as ‘Stooges’ (including Clarke) who could subtly alert the working escapees of potential enemy approaches or flashpoints.

Despite these intricate plans, the Germans discovered ‘Tom’ in September 1943 and ‘Dick’ was abandoned to be used as storage. Only ‘Harry’ was used for the breakout of 24-25 March 1944, when 76 officers escaped. After the escape, the Germans compiled a list of missing materials, and the statistics were extraordinary. The prisoners had used, among other items, 4,000 bed boards, 3,424 towels, 1,699 blankets, 305 metres (1,000 feet) of electric wire, 180 metres (600 feet) of rope, 30 shovels and 478 spoons.



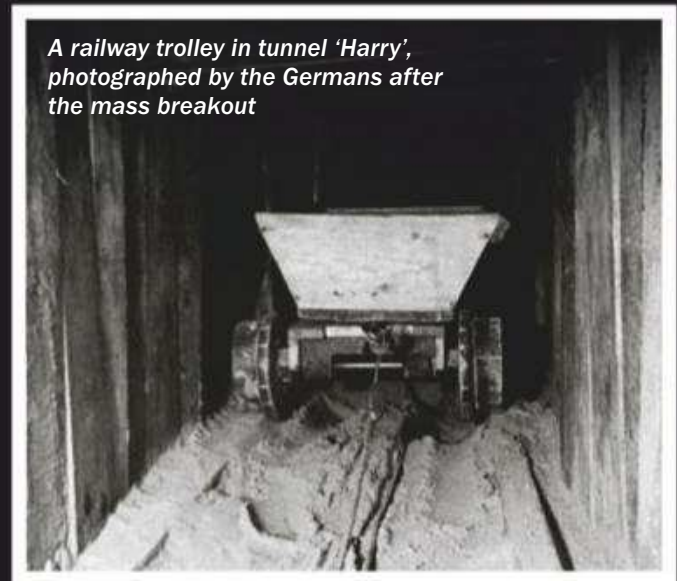
The entrance to ‘Harry’, which was located under a stove. The metal pipe provided ventilation and was constructed out of tin cans from Red Cross food parcels



Dutch pilot Bram van der Stok was one of only three prisoners from the breakout to successfully escape enemy territory, along with Norwegian airmen Per Bergsland and Jens Müller



South African-born Roger Bushell masterminded the Great Escape and was one of the 76 escapees. He was recaptured and murdered by the Gestapo



A railway trolley in tunnel ‘Harry’, photographed by the Germans after the mass breakout

was surprising. They included Jimmy James, who was a great man and a friend of mine. About 70-odd went through the tunnel; 50 were murdered, two or three successfully escaped and the rest were brought back. After the Great Escape, escaping was forbidden by the British because of the risk that people would be shot again."

A fearful time

The murder of the 50 escapees cast a shadow over the camp, and prisoners feared for their lives. "For the rest of our time at Stalag Luft III we kept wondering what was going to happen to us. After the other prisoners were shot we wondered if we would also be murdered. We even planned to defend ourselves with cudgels – it was really ridiculous because we wouldn't have stood a cat in hell's chance."

With escaping now banned, the prisoners eagerly waited for news that might lead to their liberation. "When the invasion of France occurred we thought we would be released the following week. How naïve we were, because the war went on for months after that, but we followed its progress. We had an illegal radio, and a South African newspaper reporter wrote the news down in shorthand. He would turn out a bulletin and it would be read out in each hut despite there being guards all around us."

Right: Clarke's knife, fork and spoon from Stalag Luft III were made in Germany, and the spoon was stamped with the badge of the Luftwaffe

Despite possessing the illegal radio, the Germans did not go out of their way to find it. "The Germans had a map that followed things according to their own radio, but it is reputed that the commandant asked our senior British officer how the war was going! He knew damn well we had the radio."

Although camp life was extremely tense, especially after the escape, the prisoners did find creative outlets in staging improvised theatre shows. "The Germans allowed some prisoners to build a theatre, and it was done very well. It amazes me how they allowed these theatricals to take place. I think the Red Cross brought in some clothing, and the plays they put on were out of this world. So many actors started out their careers that way. The camp had so much talent in it and they were a remarkable collection of people."

The theatre was not only a breeding ground for thespian talent, but also a useful location for another hidden tunnel. "It was under a corner of the theatre and used as a store, although it was



incomplete. I went down it and it's rumoured that sketches of the camp were hidden there, that were later used as a basis for the film *The Great Escape*. These drawings were put in a tube, stored and recovered after the war."

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Although it contained many historical inaccuracies, *The Great Escape* movie made the 1944 breakout famous around the world



After the war, the RAF Police led an extensive investigation into the Stalag Luft III murders. 72 men were eventually identified, and many were tried, executed or imprisoned



The memorial to the 50 men who were executed following the Great Escape near Zagan, Poland. Adolf Hitler personally ordered their execution



Two survivors of the Long March stand in front of a damaged Arado Ar 96 at Celle airfield, 18 April 1945

The 'Long March'

The unease within Stalag Luft III ended in early January 1945 when the Germans evacuated the camp. However, the prisoners were now subjected to an extremely harsh experience that became infamous as the 'Long March'. Clarke prepared for what he knew would be an arduous journey. "The Russians were about 32 kilometres (20 miles) away, and we could hear their gunfire. We were told that we were going to be evacuated, and I made a sledge on the last day out of a Red Cross box and put a couple of runners on the side. I pulled nails out of something, but how I got them in I don't know."

In a last-minute attempt to eat some food, Clarke resorted to a desperate measure. "I remember breaking into the so-called cookhouse, which was a hut where they used to do the hot water for our tea and coffee. I cut off a piece of meat from a carcass that was hanging there and half-cooked it, which didn't do me any good at all. When I look back it's a lesson in how not to do things!"

What Clarke was about to experience was a forced march from Poland into Germany. Between January-April 1945 tens of thousands of Allied POWs were forced to march westwards in extreme winter conditions. The German

motive was to delay the prisoners' liberation by the advancing Red Army, and many would die as a result of this severe measure.

Having constructed his sledge, Clarke walked out into the cold. "Three of us decided to share this sledge and the camp was evacuated at one o'clock in the morning. It was the coldest winter in living memory, we had no clothing as such and we certainly had no food. We trudged for 36 hours to a huge barn. We queued outside for ages, and when you got in you sat with your legs all hunched because there was no room to spread out. You were on the stone floor, but those that didn't get inside got frostbite."

After sleeping in the barn, the prisoners walked to Spremberg in Germany. "The following morning we stood around for ages before we got moving, and it was bloody cold. We then trudged until we got to Spremberg. Eventually we were put into cattle trucks, where there was once again no room to spread out."

Conditions in the trucks were grim. "The doors were clamped down, there was no heating and not even straw to sleep on. The train didn't run at night and we were put into sidings. We were terrified that our own people would bomb us. We were on this truck for

about three days, and although we had a padre he was actually very selfish and moaned and groaned. We were then turfed out again, and we queued in the snow for about six hours while they searched us one by one."

Events turned from bad to worse when the prisoners were moved to a destroyed POW camp. "We hoped that we would have some shelter, but the camp we were sent to had been completely wrecked. The Navy had occupied it before they were turfed out. They thought they were being moved to make way for refugees from Hamburg so they wrecked it before they left. The beds had been burned and the windows were broken."

Clarke contracted dysentery while he was in the camp. "I was in agony for three days. Eventually someone saw us, although I doubt very much if he was a doctor. I queued to see him and I don't know what I expected him to do, but I passed out and collapsed. I made a mess of my trousers and I was so humiliated. I don't know how I cleaned myself up, but I wasn't the only one as so many people had it."

The conditions in the camp were degrading and heart-rending. "There was no fuel. At one point I was on my haunches picking up little bits of cinders and coke that had been



Clarke with Dame Judi Dench and Women's Auxiliary Air Force veteran Igraine Hamilton at the Bomber Command Memorial in London, 21 May 2013

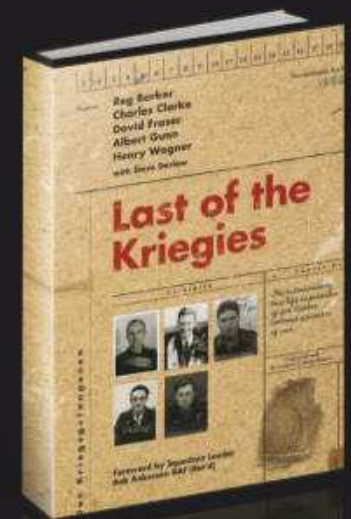
SURVIVING STALAG LUFT III



Clarke began a 100-day relay to celebrate the centenary of the RAF by passing a specially designated baton to one of the air force's youngest members, 1 April 2018

LAST OF THE KRIEGIES

Charles Clarke's incredible story is featured in *Last Of The Kriegies*, which is published by Fighting High Publishing. For more information visit: www.fighting-high-books.myshopify.com/products/last-of-the-kriegies



dumped. I probably spent half a day picking up a tin-full so that we could light a fire. It was also the first time we could see aircraft being shot down. When we were in Stalag Luft III the shutters were always closed during an air raid. However, here you saw it, and we knew how many people were in the aircraft. For example, if three men got out of a Lancaster you knew there were four left, and it was terrible. The aircraft would just explode, and it was awful to watch."

The prisoners eventually resumed the march, and although the weather improved, the conditions remained arduous. "We were walking all the time and slept out in the open. When we stopped anywhere we put on our bits of clothing that said 'POW' in the hope that we wouldn't be attacked by our own people."

After crossing the Elbe River, the prisoners were "dumped" in the open on a farm, before they were discovered by chance by a British soldier. "A light reconnaissance vehicle from 21st Army Group came into the camp, and he wasn't in the advance guard but if he was he'd probably lost his way. He said that the main force would be with us the following day. At that time the German guards had disappeared and we swamped this guy!"

"IF THREE MEN GOT OUT OF A LANCASTER YOU KNEW THERE WERE FOUR LEFT, AND IT WAS... AWFUL TO WATCH"

Clarke had survived the terrible ordeal, but many had not. Tens of thousands of Allied POWs were forced to march, but the true number of those who died was never accurately recorded. "We just kept going and were exhausted. How many people fell by the wayside? It was never known."

A cinematic legacy

After being liberated, Clarke hitchhiked his way to Brussels with the men he had shared the sledge with before he flew home, ironically enough, on a Lancaster. Despite his imprisonment, he recalls that readjusting to freedom was not difficult. "What is remarkable is that we didn't need re-settling, we all came back and led normal lives. Post-traumatic stress didn't exist in those days, you just picked up and carried on, and I think it helped."

Nevertheless, he has mixed feelings towards his German captors. "We were treated harshly but not brutally. However, even that's not true when they had shot 50 of us! We honestly thought there was a possibility that we would be killed before the end of the war."

The experience of those who spent their captivity in Stalag Luft III may have been forgotten had it not been for the release of the 1963 Hollywood film *The Great Escape*. The film catapulted the events of March 1944 to legendary status, and it has become a potent symbol of Allied – and particularly British – ingenuity, pluck, resolve and bravery.

Although he is mindful of its inaccuracies, Clarke remains enthusiastic about the film. "Obviously, somebody like Steve McQueen didn't feature at all, and it didn't depict the hardship, fear or wonderment whether we'd be murdered afterwards, because you can't translate that. But as a film that depicted some idea of what the camp was like, I think it was brilliant. The theme song is so famous, but it never had words put to it, which is amazing really. Whatever you say about the film, who would remember the *Great Escape* without it? It has been wonderful in itself and is a tremendous tribute."



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SOMOSIERRA

A daring uphill charge by Napoleon's Polish Light Horse cleared the way to Madrid and French victory over the Spanish

"WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE SHATTERED SPANISH FORCES RETREATED SOUTH TOWARDS MADRID WITH NAPOLEON HIMSELF IN VIGOROUS PURSUIT AT THE HEAD OF A 45,000-STRONG VANGUARD"



A highly stylised painting of the battle by Polish painter January Suchodolski. The Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad chapel at the summit of the pass can be seen in the background

SOMOSIERRA PASS, SEGOVIA, SPAIN 30 NOVEMBER 1808

WORDS ALEX ZAKRZEWSKI



In June 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte installed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne as a way of securing French control of the Iberian Peninsula. It turned out to have the opposite effect. The Spanish people disliked their feckless Bourbon monarchs, but they absolutely hated the meddlesome French. Within weeks, violent revolts sprang up across the country, and the overextended French forces found themselves isolated in hostile territory. In August, having resided in Madrid for only ten days, Joseph was forced to abandon his riotous capital and flee to the French border. To make matters worse, during this time the British Expeditionary Force under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley landed in Portugal, beginning the six-year-long Peninsular War.

When Napoleon learned of what had transpired in Spain, he was irate and berated his generals for their incompetence. "I realise I must go there myself to get the machine working again," he announced, and on 4 November 1808 he crossed the Pyrenees with an army of 130,000 men, mostly veterans of previous campaigns. His arrival in Spain immediately tipped the scales back in favour of the French. On 10 November he won a crushing victory at the Battle of Gamonel, and two weeks later the French defeated another Spanish army at Tudela. What was left of the shattered Spanish forces retreated south towards Madrid with Napoleon himself in vigorous pursuit at the head of a 45,000-strong vanguard.

Mountain passes

Napoleon now faced another obstacle – one that he could not simply outmanoeuvre on the battlefield. The Sierra de Guadarrama mountains run roughly 80 kilometres (50 miles) across central Spain, shielding Madrid from an attack from the north. In 1808, there were two main passes the French could have taken: one near the town of Guadarrama northwest of Madrid, and another that ran through the sleepy mountain village of Somosierra almost directly north of the capital. Napoleon chose the latter, because it was the quickest route and located along the main road south from Burgos, where he was regrouping his army.

In Madrid, Spanish General Benito San Juan desperately rallied together what forces

he could to defend the mountain passes, which he correctly reasoned was his best hope of defending the capital. To that end, he sent 9,000 men to Guadarrama and another 7,500 to Somosierra. Another token force was posted north of the mountains to harry the French advance. Though the Somosierra force had fewer men than the contingent sent to Guadarrama, it included 16 cannon – all the guns that San Juan could scrounge together amid the chaotic Spanish retreat.

The Somosierra Pass was the perfect place for a spirited defence. For the first few kilometres the mountain road ascended gently over largely open ground, until it reached a mountain river called the Duratón. It then steepened sharply, eventually climbing to a height of 1,430 metres (4,700 feet). On either side of the road, the slopes were dotted by a series of rocky spurs and ridges, as well as trees and vegetation, which made them difficult but not impossible to traverse. At the summit, there stood the ancient Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad chapel. From there the road levelled off before beginning a gradual descent through Somosierra.



Left: Colonel Jan Koziatulski was the original leader of the charge at Somosierra. He was badly wounded at the Battle of Wagram the following year, and saved Napoleon's life in Russia. For his distinguished service he was made a baron of the empire

“HE RETURNED TO REPORT TO THE EMPEROR THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SEIZE THE PASS THROUGH A FRONTAL ASSAULT. ‘IMPOSSIBLE? IMPOSSIBLE? I DO NOT KNOW THIS WORD,’ BONAPARTE ANGRILY EXCLAIMED”

San Juan positioned three batteries, of two guns each, along the road at intervals of roughly 550 metres (600 yards). He placed the first battery at a stone bridge across the Duratón. At the summit, where the road widened and levelled, he had improvised breastworks constructed, behind which he positioned ten guns and 2,000 of his men. He placed the rest of his forces on the rough slopes on either side of the road, where the difficult terrain put them in a good position to repulse an attack.

French attack

At about 9am on the foggy morning of 30 November 1808, Napoleon ordered General François Ruffin's division to seize the pass in a three-pronged attack. While the 96th Line Infantry Regiment advanced up the pass along

the road, the 24th Line Infantry and 9th Light Infantry Regiments were ordered to climb the rocky slopes on either side and cover the flanks. They were to be supported by a number of horse-drawn artillery pieces. However, such was the thickness of the fog that the French were not sure how many Spanish awaited them or where exactly they were positioned.

At first the French infantry seemed to make good progress, but when the 96th reached the stone bridge they were suddenly swept by cannon fire from the first Spanish battery, and their advance ground to an abrupt halt. Up on the slopes, the other two regiments were similarly stalled by withering volleys of musket fire from the well-placed Spanish defenders. At the same time, the French artillery proved unable to keep up in the rough terrain and could not support the attack.

Achieving the ‘impossible’

By 11am the French attack had stalled completely. However, it was around this time that the fog finally began to lift, and Napoleon ordered one of his aides to reconnoitre the Spanish positions and ascertain what exactly was going on.

When the aide saw the Spanish batteries and the narrowness of the road they guarded, he returned to report to the emperor that it was impossible to seize the pass through a frontal assault. “Impossible? Impossible? I do not know this word,” Napoleon angrily exclaimed. “What? My guard halted by a band of armed peasants!” He turned to his cavalry escort, which that day happened to be the Third Squadron of the

The commander of the Cheveau-Légers Polonais, Count Wincenty Krasinski, was not present the day of the battle, but he went to great lengths to make it seem like he was. This painting by French artist Émile Jean-Horace Vernet depicts him at the summit of the pass following the charge



OPPOSING FORCES



FRANCE

LEADERS:

- Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte
- General François Ruffin
- Colonel Jan Koziatulski
- Captain Jan Dziewanowski
- Captain Piotr Krasinski
- Lieutenant Andrzej Niegolewski

FORCES:

- I Corps
- 45,000 men (infantry & cavalry)
- 12 guns

VS



SPAIN

LEADERS:

- General Benito San Juan

FORCES:

- 7,500 Infantry
- 16 guns

THE CHEVAU-LÉGERS POLONAIS

THE ELITE POLISH LIGHT HORSE OF NAPOLEON'S IMPERIAL GUARD WAS COMPRISED OF NOBLES AND MEN OF MEANS

When Napoleon entered Warsaw in December 1806 he was greeted as a hero and liberator. Russia, Prussia and Austria had partitioned Poland a decade earlier, erasing the country from the map of Europe. France's victories over the partitioning powers sparked a wave of patriotic sentiment and hopes of a national resurgence. As a show of gratitude, the citizens of Warsaw raised a mounted honour guard made up of young noblemen to escort the French emperor during his stay in the country. Napoleon was so impressed by the skill and bearing of these men that he ordered a Polish Light Horse regiment be raised and added to his Imperial Guard.

Enlistment standards were set deliberately high in order to ensure the unit met the elite calibre of the Imperial Guard. Most officers were aristocrats and even troopers had to be men of means, capable of paying for their own horse, uniforms and equipment.

Each man carried an assortment of weaponry typical of light cavalry units of the era, including a sabre, pistols and carbine. Contrary to popular belief, the unit was not originally armed with lances, but was refitted as a lancer regiment in the spring of 1809. Their uniforms were distinguished by two distinctly Polish features: the square-topped *czapka* (cap) and double-breasted *kurtka* (jacket).

The commander of the regiment was officially Count Wincenty Krasinski, an experienced cavalryman and nobleman of considerable wealth and influence. But his duties kept him away from the regiment most of the time, and it was French Colonel Major Pierre Dautancourt, affectionately nicknamed 'Papa' by his men, who was the true day-to-day commander. When they first arrived in Spain in 1808, the regiment also benefited from the tutelage of General Antoine

Lasalle, one of Napoleon's most colourful and talented cavalry officers.

Following the fall of Madrid, the regiment returned to France in early 1809 and went on to serve with distinction in Austria, in Spain once again, in the disastrous Russian campaign and in France. Their skill and boldness on the battlefield earned them international fame and notoriety. The Spanish nicknamed them the 'Devil's Lancers'. While in Russia, other French cavalry units frequently borrowed their caps and capes when going on picket duty as a means of keeping Cossacks away. Two more regiments of Polish Imperial Guard lancers were eventually raised, and 109 accompanied Napoleon into his first exile on Elba. Following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, all officers and men were forced to leave the French army and return to Poland.

The Cheveau-Légers Polonais charge into battle at Wagram (1809). The two-day clash was a bloodbath, and the regiment suffered heavy casualties but again distinguished itself in the French victory



SOMOSIERRA

SOMOSIERRA

ERMITA

To Madrid

01 BATTERY POSITIONS
 San Juan places his guns at intervals along the road. The first three batteries have two guns each. He places the first battery at a stone bridge across the Duratón. At the summit he positions ten guns and 2,000 men behind improvised breastworks.

02 WELL-PLACED INFANTRY
 Most of the Spanish infantry are positioned on the slopes of the pass, where the rough terrain and morning fog put them in a good position to repel a French attack.

03 FRENCH INFANTRY ADVANCE
 At first, the 96th Line Infantry Regiment, part of Ruffin's division, make good progress up the road. When they reach the first battery, which is placed at the stone bridge, their advance is stalled by cannon fire.

04 DEADLY FIRE
 The French regiments on the slopes find it difficult to advance up the rough terrain and are swept by a withering fire from the Spanish infantry. They return fire, but it has little effect in the dense fog.

● French army
 ● Spanish army

“COMMAND OF THE CHARGE CHANGES HANDS NUMEROUS TIMES AND THEY SUFFER HORRIBLE CASUALTIES, BUT THEY REACH THE SUMMIT”

DURATON (Stream)

3rd Squadron CHEVAU-LÉGERS POLOINAIIS

24th LINE

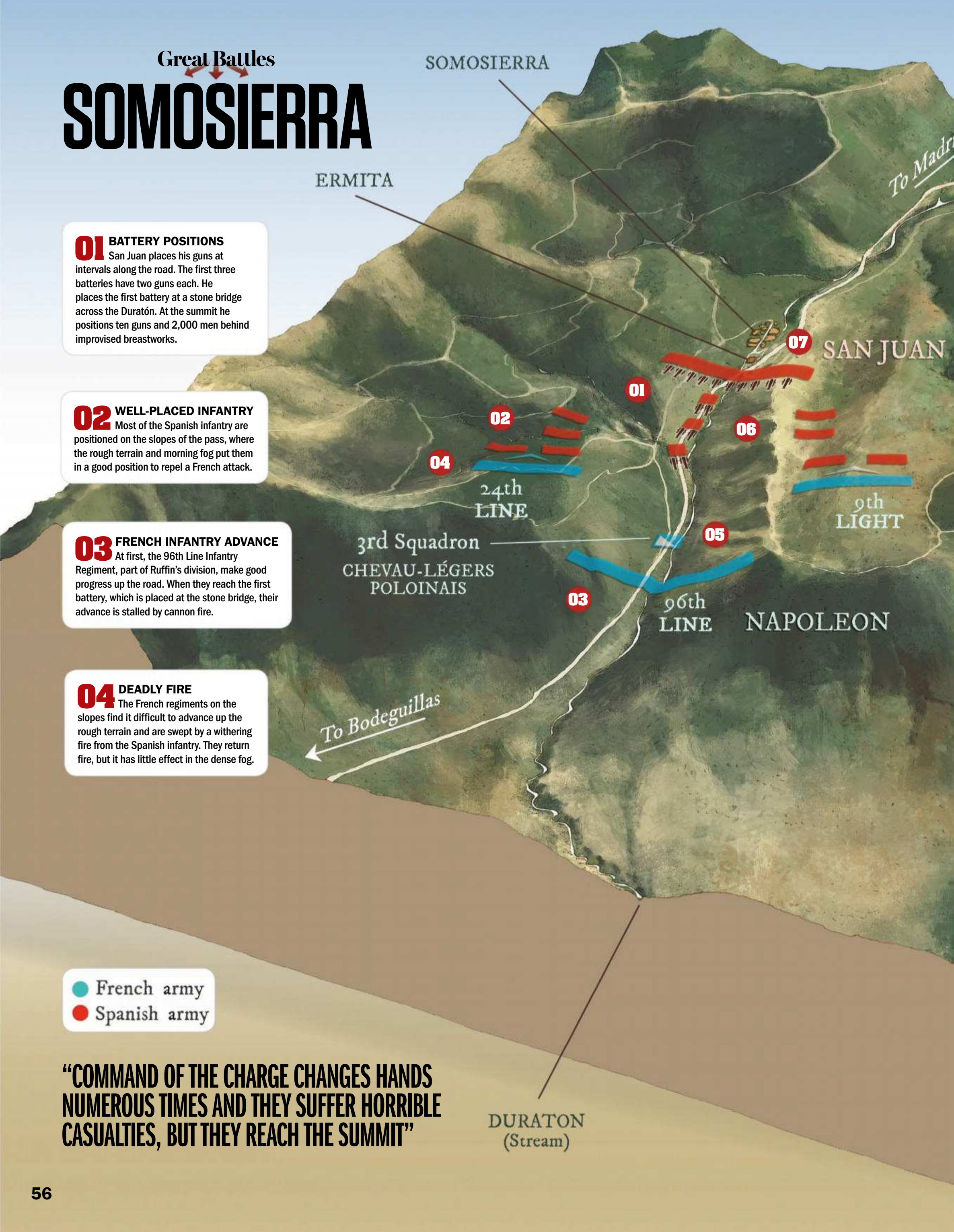
96th LINE

9th LIGHT

NAPOLEON

To Bodeguillas

SAN JUAN



SIERRA DE
GUADARRAMA

Map: Rocío Espin

05 NAPOLEON'S IMPATIENCE Furious at the lack of progress, Napoleon orders his cavalry escort, the Third Squadron of Cheveau-Légers Polonais, to attack the first Spanish battery and open the road for Ruffin's infantry.

06 THE CHARGE CONTINUES After taking the first battery, the Poles continue up the road. They face brutal fire from both the Spanish cannon and the infantry on the slopes. Command of the charge changes hands numerous times and they suffer horrible casualties, but they reach the summit.

07 THE SUMMIT Once at the summit, the Poles face a fierce Spanish counterattack. Luckily, Ruffin's infantry, accompanied by Napoleon himself, are not far behind. Their arrival puts the Spanish to flight. The road to Madrid is opened, and the city falls to the French four days later.



Cheveau-Légers Polonais (Polish Light Horse) of the Imperial Guard, and ordered them to attack.

It is unclear what exactly Napoleon meant by his order to attack. That is to say, whether he intended for the Poles to just take the first battery and open the road, or for them to storm the entire pass. Either way, the squadron's commander, Colonel Jan Koziatowski, was not about to question an order from Napoleon. He immediately drew his sabre and loudly bellowed, "Forward you sons of dogs, the emperor is watching you!" Behind him, the roughly 125 officers and men of the Third Squadron drew their sabres and followed him up the road.

"THE POLES DID NOT STOP. THEY SURGED THROUGH THE BATTERY, SILENCING THE GUNS AND SENDING THE BEWILDERED GUNNERS FLEEING UP THE ROAD IN TERROR"

The charge begins

The squadron advanced at a trot, then a canter, and finally, when they were within sight of the guns, they broke into a gallop. Such was the narrowness of the road that the Poles were forced to ride four abreast in a long column – a cumbersome formation that made it difficult to pick up speed and manoeuvre. The Spanish waited until they were a few hundred metres away then opened fire with a devastating salvo that smashed the head of the column. Horses and riders tumbled to the ground, but the Poles did not stop. They surged through the battery, silencing the guns and sending the bewildered gunners fleeing up the road in terror.

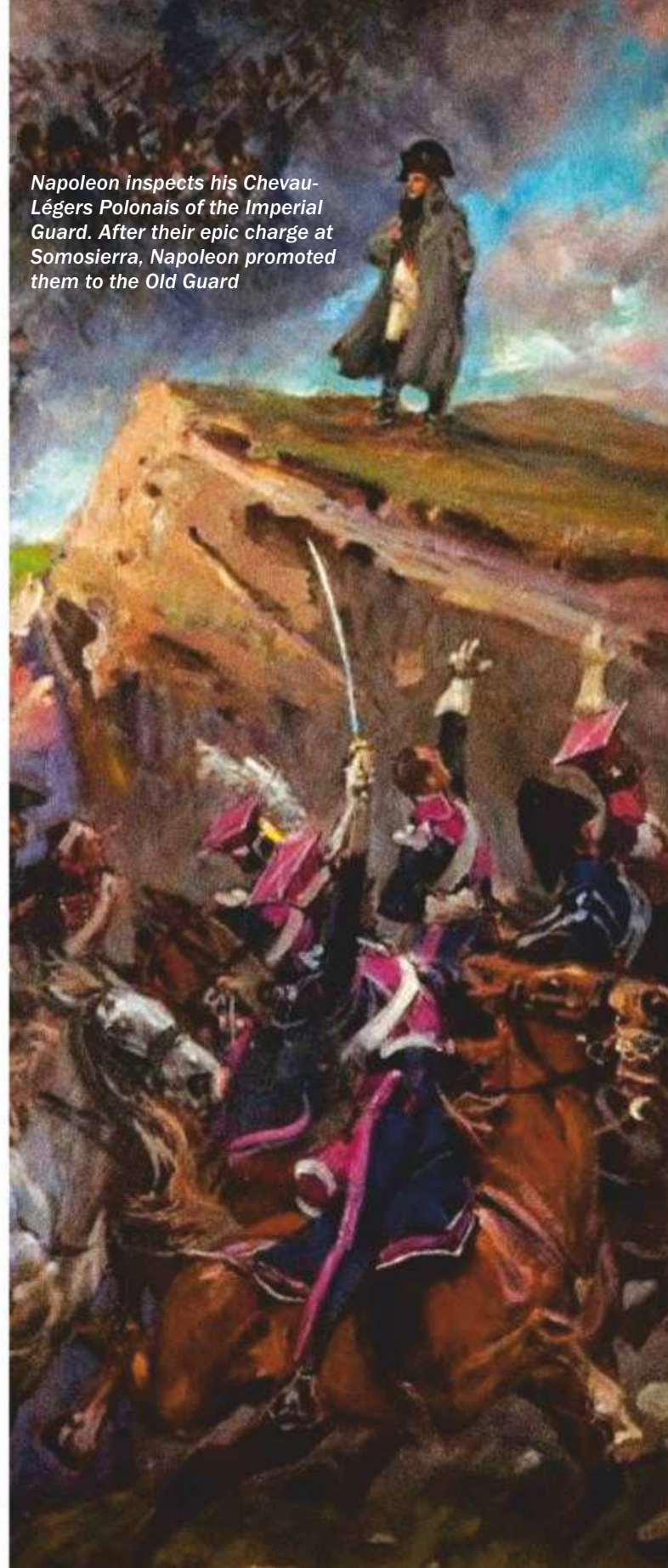
By taking the first battery, the Poles had most likely fulfilled their objective and probably could have stopped where they were and waited for Ruffin's infantry to take over. Instead they spurred their horses on and continued up the road towards the second battery. The further they got, the more intense the Spanish fire became, not just from the batteries but from the infantry on the slopes, who turned to unleash a deadly crossfire. Shortly after taking the first battery, Koziatowski's horse was killed and he was thrown to the ground, his leg badly bruised but otherwise unhurt. Command passed to Captain Dzienanowski, who led the squadron crashing through the second battery, once again silencing the guns and cutting down their crews.

Mountain maelstrom

Yet again the Poles did not stop but continued on to the third battery. In truth, they had probably come too far at this point to turn back even if they wanted to. Any loss of forward momentum would have only intensified the maelstrom of bursting shells and whistling bullets they now faced. Men and horses everywhere screamed in pain and terror, and they crashed to the ground with crippling force. Those that followed behind did their best to avoid trampling their comrades, but by now most riders had lost control of their maddened, frothing mounts, many of which were



The regiment's uniforms were dark blue with red facings and white or silver cord. In the decades following the Napoleonic Wars, armies across Europe would adopt the Polish-style square-topped czapka (cap) and tight-fitting kurtka (coat) for their own light cavalry units



Napoleon inspects his Cheval-Légers Polonais of the Imperial Guard. After their epic charge at Somosierra, Napoleon promoted them to the Old Guard

grievously wounded and galloping solely out of fear, adrenaline and an instinct to follow the herd.

As they approached the third battery, Dziewanowski was shot off his horse and left badly bleeding by the side of the road. Command passed once again, this time to Captain Krasinski, who was also dismounted shortly after, though he was miraculously unhurt and was able to make his way back down the road on foot. He passed through a charnel ground of dead and dying men and horses, many badly mangled by the point-blank salvos of shrapnel and grapeshot. Meanwhile, command of the charge passed for the third and final time to Lieutenant Niegolewski. He led the remainder of the squadron through the third battery and on towards the summit, where ten guns and thousands of Spanish defenders awaited them.

However, the Poles had one important factor working in their favour. The lingering fog had combined with the dense pall of cannon smoke to severely obscure visibility along the road. As a result, many of the Spanish troops could not see just how few in number the Poles actually were. Convinced that an enormous force of French cavalry was thundering towards them, they began abandoning their positions and retreating

“THE EMPEROR WAS SO MOVED BY THE YOUNG CAVALIER’S SUFFERING THAT HE CLIMBED DOWN FROM HIS HORSE AND THANKED HIM WARMLY FOR HIS BRAVERY AND SACRIFICE. HE THEN REMOVED THE LEGION D’HONNEUR FROM HIS OWN COAT AND PINNED IT ON NIEGOLEWSKI”

towards the summit. As a result, by the time the Poles reached the final battery, what should have been San Juan’s strongest position and the attackers’ deadliest obstacle had devolved into a chaotic mob of panic-stricken troops fleeing in all directions.

The summit is reached

Finally on open and level ground, the attackers fanned out in all directions, hacking and slashing furiously at the fleeing enemy. After their hellish experience in the pass, they were just as crazed as their horses and eager to exact revenge. But by now their numbers had been so severely reduced that a shocked Niegolewski paused to ask Sergeant Sokolowski where the rest

of the squadron was. “All dead, sir!” was the sobering response. It was not long before the fleeing Spanish also noticed just how few of the attackers were left. They regained their resolve and fell upon the outnumbered Poles from all sides. Niegolewski’s horse was killed under him and he fell to the ground, pinned beneath its weight. He was shot twice, bayoneted nine times and robbed of anything of value, before his attackers finally left him for dead.

For a moment, it seemed as if the tide of battle had turned and that the Poles’ costly heroics had been in vain. But just when it appeared that the Third Squadron was on the verge of annihilation, there arose from the distance a familiar beating of drums and

With the path to the Spanish capital clear, Napoleon Bonaparte accepted the city's surrender on 4 December 1808



chorus of “Vive L’Empereur”. It grew louder and louder until finally General Ruffin’s men began pouring out of the smoke and fog. Their arrival broke what will to fight was left in the Spanish, and they fled in disorder.

Accompanying Ruffin’s men was Napoleon himself. He spotted the horribly wounded Niegolewski leaning against one of the captured cannons, covered in blood and barely clinging to life. The emperor was so moved by the young cavalier’s suffering that he climbed down from his horse and thanked him warmly for his bravery and sacrifice. He then removed the Legion d’Honneur from his own coat and pinned it on Niegolewski.

Aftermath

The charge had lasted seven minutes. In that time, the Poles had captured 16 guns and ten standards. More importantly, they had opened the road to Madrid. But they had paid a horrible price. Only 26 officers and men answered the roll call that evening. Few, if any, were completely unscathed. Many of the wounded eventually succumbed to their injuries, including Captain Dziewanowski.

Incredibly, Lieutenant Niegolewski recovered from his wounds and went on to

“ARGUABLY THE LAST CASUALTY WAS GENERAL SAN JUAN, WHO WAS BLAMED FOR THE DISASTER AND LYNCHED BY HIS OWN MUTINOUS MEN”

see further service in Spain, Austria, Russia and France, before eventually returning to Poland. He was not the only member of the squadron to be honoured by the emperor. In total, 16 officers and troopers received the Legion d’Honneur for their gallantry. The day after the charge, after personally inspecting the entire regiment, Napoleon respectfully removed his hat and declared, “You are worthy of my Old Guard! Honour to the bravest of the brave!”

The overall number of Spanish losses at Somosierra is unknown. The French pursued San Juan’s retreating men well into the afternoon, taking around 3,000 prisoners. The number of killed and wounded was probably

relatively light given the overall brevity of the engagement. Arguably the last casualty was General San Juan, who was blamed for the disaster and lynched by his own mutinous men one week later.

Just four days after the battle, Madrid surrendered to Napoleon without a fight, and he reinstated his brother on the Spanish throne. He spent a few more months mopping up Spanish resistance, then returned to France and turned his attention to a resurgent Austria. He took with him his Cheveau-Légers Polonais of the Old Guard.

FURTHER READING

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Heroes of the Victoria Cross

WILLIAM LEEFE ROBINSON

Britain's war-weary population was given a night to remember when an RFC airman shot down a German airship over Hertfordshire in 1916. The 21-year-old pilot became a national sensation and epitomised the glamour of Britain's early airmen

WORDS BETH WYATT

In the early hours of 3 September 1916, the villagers of Cuffley, Hertfordshire, gathered for an unexpected spectacle. A German airship had been shot out of the sky, and an inferno had quickly taken its place. 16 men lay dead inside, but for the villagers this was a scene of unabashed celebration – at last one of the feared German Zeppelins (as they believed the airship to be) had been shot down by Britain's valiant defenders, the pilots of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). This night would not only be imprinted on those who watched it unfold, but also on the man responsible for the jubilation. William Leefe Robinson – a humble, young pilot serving in 39 Squadron – was transformed into a national treasure overnight after becoming the first person to shoot down an enemy airship over Britain. For this incredible feat he was awarded the Victoria Cross – the fastest to have ever been issued.

Robinson was not a man preordained to achieve glory in the skies. The Royal Military College, Sandhurst graduate's Great War service began as a second lieutenant with the 5th Militia Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment. But he soon became restless, with his role centering on preparing soldiers for the front. Raymond Laurence Rimell, a biographer of Robinson, argued that, "There seems little reason to suppose that Robinson had any great ambition for flying, the subject was never raised in correspondence, more likely the tedium of his position was such that he fired off as many applications as possible and took the first one



A British propaganda postcard depicting the demise of Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 over Cuffley

offered him". On 29 March 1915, Robinson commenced his new career as an observer with 4 Squadron of the RFC. Six months later, on 18 September, he was promoted to flying officer, having earned his wings after a spell of recuperation in England due to a shrapnel wound received in France.

On the night of 2 September 1916, Robinson was on duty at Sutton's Farm airfield, Hornchurch, Essex, where he was stationed with 39 Squadron. *The Times*, recalling the extraordinary events of 2 September in the issue of 11 April 1917, wrote that the pilot "was attached to various stations in England for night flying, and before the exploit for which the King awarded him the V.C. had been up on every occasion of a raid in the neighbourhood of London for a period of seven months."

The warning on 2 September that an enemy raid over Britain was imminent came through before 5pm. The Germans' choice of evening proved off the mark: grey skies and fierce winds frosted the hulls of the 12 navy and four army airships and some were forced to return home. Only Hauptmann Wilhelm Schramm's Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 managed to reach within 11 kilometres (seven miles) of Charing Cross.

Robinson's Home Defence squadron began its defence of the capital just after 11pm. Robinson's patrol was between Hornchurch and Joyce Green, Kent. His first encounter of the night with an enemy airship was not with the ill-fated Schütte-Lanz SL11 (incorrectly labeled as a Zeppelin after the events), but with the Zeppelin L.Z.98, which had been dropping

William Leefe Robinson
pictured around 1916.
He was the first person
to shoot down an airship
over British skies

“HIS MAJESTY THE KING HAS BEEN GRACIOUSLY PLEASED TO AWARD THE VICTORIA CROSS TO THE UNDERMENTIONED OFFICER FOR MOST CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY. HE ATTACKED AN ENEMY AIRSHIP UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREAT DIFFICULTY AND DANGER, AND SENT IT CRASHING TO THE GROUND AS A FLAMING WRECK”

– Victoria Cross citation, *London Gazette*, 5 September

HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS

bombs in the Kent area. But Robinson was not in luck with this first sighting. He later wrote, "I very slowly gained on it for about ten minutes – I judged it to be about 800 feet (245 metres) below me, and I sacrificed my speed in order to keep the height. It went behind some clouds, avoided the searchlights and I lost sight of it..."

If Robinson had kept to his given patrol time, which had ended by this point, he would never have received the Victoria Cross (at least not in these circumstances). But on he continued, towards London, reasoning that the city's searchlights could assist him.

While the 21-year-old was patrolling in his B.E.2c plane, north London had become a target for Schramm's S.L.11. The commander released a succession of high-explosive bombs, but his aircraft was caught by searchlights in Finsbury and Victoria Park as it hovered above Alexandra Palace. Crowds of thousands watched in anticipation as the Finsbury anti-aircraft guns began to fire.

Robinson was one of three 39 Squadron pilots to clock the airship – along with Second Lieutenants Mackay and Hunt. However, it was Robinson who successfully gave chase. Schramm's airship vanished into clouds after turning over Tottenham, but to Robinson's advantage the S.L.11 was closer by when it reappeared. In his report of the night, the pilot wrote, "I flew about 800 feet (245 metres) below it from bow to stern and distributed one drum along it (alternate New Brock and Pomeroy). It seemed to have no effect; I therefore moved to one side and gave it another drum distributed along its side – without apparent effect. I then got behind it (by this time I was very close – 500 feet or less below) and concentrated one drum on one part (underneath rear). I was then at a height of 11,500 feet (3,505 metres) when attacking the Zeppelin.

"I hardly finished the drum before I saw the part fired at glow. In a few seconds the whole rear part was blazing. When the third drum was fired there were no searchlights on the Zeppelin and no anti-aircraft was firing. I quickly got out of the way of the falling, blazing Zeppelin and being very excited fired off a few red Very's lights and dropped a parachute flare."

Robinson's combination of the popular Lewis gun and incendiary bullets succeeded when he concentrated his fire, and the fiery husk of the airship crashed into a field in Cuffley, Hertfordshire at about 2.20am on 3 September. The entire crew of 16 perished.

Living under the strain of two years of war, the public needed the morale boost Robinson's actions gave them. Thousands left their homes in the middle of the night to watch their new hero as the searchlights illuminated his chase.

Aviation historian Richard C. Smith wrote of the spectacle, in his book *Hornchurch Streets Of Heroes*: "The scene was witnessed by thousands of people within London and the surrounding areas; they cheered and sang as the airship descended in flames."

Despite the aircraft being the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11, the authorities referred to it as a Zeppelin L.21 – potentially, as the RAF Museum has suggested, to "prevent public confusion" between the different aircraft. The Schütte-Lanz was wooden-framed compared to the duralumin metal Zeppelin.

The scene over Cuffley, Hertfordshire, as spotlights hunt for airships



"MY UNCLE WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE APPROVED. HE WAS A GET-UP-AND-GO MAN. IF THERE WAS A DEED TO BE DONE, OFF HE WENT"

– William Leefe Robinson's niece Regina Libin speaking to *The Times* on 22 November 1988 about the sale at Christie's of his VC medal

Huge crowds visited the scene of the wreckage in the subsequent days. *The Times*, on 5 September, estimated that 10,000 people so far had turned up at the site. Souvenir hunters quickly descended on the site, and their spoils would turn up at community exhibitions and other occasions over the following months.

Robinson – whose actions had punctured the image of the invincible German airship – experienced a surreal 48 hours following the events; within that time he was presented with the Victoria Cross by King George V at Windsor Castle – the fastest VC to ever be issued. The pilot was approached by members of the public en masse in the street, given standing ovations in theatres and sent mail by his adoring fans, in the form of photos from actresses and letters from schoolgirls, as the Imperial War Museum's research has found. The pilot also received monetary awards from individuals and companies who had promised to reward the first airman to bring down a Zeppelin over Britain. A modest man, Robinson was

“ROBINSON WAS TAKEN TO A CELL AND, FOR DISOBEYING AN ‘ORDER’, WAS WHIPPED TO THE POINT OF COLLAPSE”

– Norwegian pilot Tryggve Gran, Robinson's fellow prisoner in Holzminden

somewhat embarrassed by the attention and, it seems, desperate to be sent to the front. The authorities capitulated, and he travelled to France on 17 March 1917.

On 5 April, Robinson's squadron was attacked over Douai, northern France, by the ‘Red Baron’ Manfred von Richthofen and his men. Robinson was captured and spent the remainder of the war in prisoner of war camps.

He was particularly harshly treated due to his status as the destroyer of S.L.11, and he made several unsuccessful escape attempts. By the time he returned home in December 1918 to his loved ones, including his fiancée Joan Whipple, Captain Robinson was a changed man, frail from the punishments he had suffered. To the heartbreak of the nation, he succumbed to the ‘Spanish Influenza’ epidemic on 31 December 1918, aged just 23.

The legacy of the people's pilot lived on in the minds of those who had celebrated his achievements, and also in the form of tangible memorials. As reported in *The Times* on 10 June 1921, the Cuffley field in which his almost-mythic status was forged became home to a granite obelisk in his memory, with the funds raised by readers of the *Daily Express*. At the unveiling, the newspaper's editor R.D. Blumenfeld expressed the admiration and gratitude they felt towards Robinson, describing the obelisk as “a spontaneous tribute to the heroism of a national figure, whose name shall live for ever”.



The wreckage of the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 that was shot down on 3 September 1916



GRAND HETMAN JAN KAROL CHODKIEWICZ

This commander led the Polish-Lithuanian army to victory in three major wars through a combination of surprise, concentration & shock charges

WORDS WILLIAM E. WELSH

In autumn 1620 a Polish-Lithuanian expeditionary army was pinned down at Cecora on the Prut River in Moldavia, fighting for its life. The army's septuagenarian commander, Polish Grand Crown Hetman Stanislaw Zółkiewski, had parried the enemy's thrusts in an impressive fashion for more than two weeks. At last unable to maintain his position, he ordered a fighting retreat towards friendly territory in Poltava.

Just as the retreating army was nearing the frontier, all semblance of discipline broke down. Ottoman horsemen ran down the fleeing Christians. Zółkiewski was among the slain. The Ottomans severed his head and bore it to Istanbul as a present to Sultan Osman II. When word of the disaster at Cecora reached Polish King Sigismund III Vasa, he knew that only one man had the skill to defeat the Ottomans. That man was Lithuanian Grand Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz.

Groomed for success

Chodkiewicz, who was born around 1560, attended school in Vilnius, where his father was castellan. Upon graduation he travelled west to observe the Spanish and Dutch armies during the Dutch Revolt, presumably as an aide-de-camp. This exposed him to the western tradition of warfare with its linear tactics, as

well as the latest advances in siege technology. Afterwards, he returned to his native land, where his initial assignments in the Polish-Lithuanian army during the 1590s familiarised him with the eastern tradition of warfare that borrowed the concept of the feigned retreat from the Mongols.

In 1600 Chodkiewicz served as a subordinate commander to Polish Grand Hetman Jan Zamoyski in a campaign to install a Polish-leaning voivode in Moldavia. Zamoyski was so impressed by Chodkiewicz's performance that he recommended him for promotion. As a result, Chodkiewicz was appointed starosta of the Duchy of Samogitia. This put him geographically in close proximity to Livonia, an area hotly contested by Sweden, Russia and Lithuania in the aftermath of the collapse of the Teutonic Order in 1525.

Service in Livonia

The politics of the eastern Baltic in the late 16th century was complex. King Sigismund III Vasa, a devout Roman Catholic, initially ruled not only Poland and Lithuania, but also held the Swedish crown. By choosing to reside in Warsaw, though, he alienated the Swedish people. Moreover, his religious preference was abhorrent to the Protestant Swedes. Duke Charles of Södermanland, who was

Sigismund's uncle, contested Sigismund's claim to the Swedish throne. Sigismund invaded Sweden in 1598 but was forced to withdraw without securing the throne.

Charles seized the initiative two years later and invaded Livonia. The first major clash of the Polish-Swedish War occurred on 23 June 1601 at Kokenhausen in southern Livonia. Lithuanian Grand Hetman Krzysztof Radziwiłł led 3,000 troops into action against 4,900 Swedes led by Carl Gyllenhielm, a middling Swedish commander. Chodkiewicz, who held the rank of field hetman, served as Radziwiłł's second-in-command. Radziwiłł formed his troops into three lines. As a sign of his confidence in Chodkiewicz, he gave him the place of honour, commanding 1,000 horsemen in two regiments on the right wing.

The battle began with Chodkiewicz hurling his mounted hussars against the Swedish left. Radziwiłł repulsed an attack by the Swedish cavalry, and then committed his reserve. The Swedish army was badly cut up. Chodkiewicz learned at Kokenhausen that the Swedes were extremely vulnerable to the hussars' shock charge because of their overreliance on musketry.

In the months that followed, both sides fed fresh troops into the war. Suffering from poor health, Radziwiłł passed command to Zamoyski,

JAN KAROL CHODKIEWICZ

Jan Karol Chodkiewicz led Polish-Lithuanian forces to victory against the armies of Sweden, Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire. In two decades of continual warfare he compiled a nearly unblemished record of victories.

He is shown here at the pinnacle of his career as grand hetman of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He wears a gold embroidered silk zupan with a crimson cloak, known as a delia, draped over it that signifies he is a powerful magnate. He holds in his hand a ceremonial baton known as a buława that signifies his lofty military rank.

Portrait of Jan Karol Chodkiewicz (1560-1621), 17th century. Found in the Collection of State Art Gallery, Lviv

“THROUGH DRILLING AND EXPERIENCE, CHODKIEWICZ FORGED AN ELITE FORCE. HE RULED WITH THE PROVERBIAL IRON HAND AND HE WAS RESPECTED FOR HIS SKILL AND BRAVERY IN BATTLE”



who arrived in Livonia at the head of 15,000 fresh troops. By the end of 1602, Zamoyski had recaptured most of Livonia except for several key towns, such as Pärnu, Revel and Dorpat. When Zamoyski fell seriously ill, command of the Commonwealth forces in Livonia passed to Chodkiewicz in October 1602.

Unconventional methods

Through drilling and experience, Chodkiewicz forged an elite force. He ruled with the proverbial iron hand, and he was respected for his skill and bravery in battle. The wily commander led his troops on arduous forced marches through swamps and forests in order to cut the supply lines of Swedish forces. He captured strategic castles and towns in northern Livonia held by the Swedes using unconventional siege methods. Instead of squandering valuable time besieging the castles, Chodkiewicz used his versatile cavalry to blockade them into submission. This way, he avoided having to march with an artillery train and construct lengthy siege lines.

After driving Swedish forces under General Arvid Stålarms out of Dorpat on 13 April 1603,

Chodkiewicz moved northwest towards Revel. Stålarms attacked him at Weissenstein on 15 September 1604 but was repulsed with crushing losses. Ten days later Chodkiewicz smashed Swedish forces defending the key port of Revel.

The Swedish Riksdag authorised the recruitment of thousands of fresh conscripts in 1605 and also hired veteran mercenaries to launch a fresh offensive against Riga, the principal port in Livonia. Three separate armies, each numbering about 5,000 men, landed on the Livonian coast in the summer of 1605. Charles, who had been crowned King Charles IX in March 1604, joined the Swedish army besieging Riga.

Decision at Kircholm

Although he missed an opportunity to destroy the Swedish armies piecemeal before they joined, Chodkiewicz nonetheless moved to engage them, even though he was outnumbered nearly three to one. The Polish-Lithuanian army, which consisted of 3,800 mounted lancers and 1,200 Courland musketeers, squared off against 14,000

Swedes at Kircholm on 27 September. To make his army appear small and vulnerable, Chodkiewicz ordered his subordinates to pack their troops into as small an area as possible.

After approaching the Swedish force, which was arrayed on higher ground, he ordered his troops to retreat. It was not a real withdrawal, but a ruse to lure the Swedes into a position where they would be vulnerable to an attack. The Swedish infantry marched after the retiring Polish-Lithuanian troops.

The Polish hussars suddenly turned around and charged the Swedish foot. The armoured horsemen crashed at full force into the enemy. When their lightweight lances shattered on impact, the hussars reached under their saddles and unsheathed their 1.5-metre (five-foot) swords (*koncerz*). The unarmoured Swedish foot stood no chance against such an onslaught. Chodkiewicz sent his remaining cavalry to encircle the Swedish army and attack it from the flanks and rear.

Chodkiewicz had unwavering confidence in his hussars. He did not worry about the cost of the hussars' wild charges. "Kill first and calculate afterwards" was his motto. In less than an hour's time, the triumphant Poles and Lithuanians had destroyed the Swedish king's army and saved Riga. In recognition of his achievement at Kircholm, King Sigismund presented Chodkiewicz with the ceremonial mace signifying his elevation to grand hetman. Chodkiewicz replaced Radziwiłł, who retired

“CHODKIEWICZ HAD UNWAVERING CONFIDENCE IN HIS HUSSARS. HE DID NOT WORRY ABOUT THE COST OF THE HUSSARS’ WILD CHARGES. ‘KILL FIRST AND CALCULATE AFTERWARDS’ WAS HIS MOTTO”

Polish-Lithuanian Grand Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz directs the Commonwealth's army against the Ottomans at Khotyn in 1621



An ornate 17th-century sabre, made of steel, gold, silver, leather, wood and semiprecious stones

“THE NOTION OF A POLISH TSAR WAS ABHORRENT TO THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE, AND SO IN 1611 THEY REVOLTED”

from active service. Although the war dragged on in Livonia for six more years, the Swedes ultimately failed in their attempt to conquer it.

March to Moscow

When Russian Tsar Vasili IV, who in 1606 had succeeded a pretender known as Dmitry I, entered into an alliance with Sweden in 1609, King Sigismund formally declared war on Muscovy. With the war in Sweden winding down, Chodkiewicz left Livonia to direct the siege of Russian-held Smolensk. The fortress had stone walls that were 18 metres (60 feet) tall and 4.5 metres (15 feet) thick. The Russians nullified Polish attempts at mining the walls with skilful counter-mining. Eventually the garrison dwindled to just 200 defenders, at which point Chodkiewicz's troops captured the fortress by storm, ending the 21-month siege.

While Chodkiewicz was focused on capturing Smolensk, Zółkiewski won a great victory on 4 July 1610 against Vasili's army at Klushino outside Moscow. Vasili IV had been a weak ruler whose reign did nothing to remedy



At Kircholm in 1605 the Polish-Lithuanian winged hussars attacked in waves to defeat the Swedish army

Russia's ongoing political turmoil. Because the Russian nobility feared another pretender might be put on the throne, the nobles reluctantly accepted Polish crown prince Władysław IV Vasa as their tsar.

Yet the notion of a Polish tsar was abhorrent to the Russian people, and so in 1611 they revolted against Tsar Władysław, besieging the Polish garrison in Moscow's Kremlin fortress. King Sigismund marched east to relieve the beleaguered troops inside the Kremlin.

When the relief army reached Moscow on 1 September, Chodkiewicz hurled his troops at

the Russian defences. The attackers achieved a limited penetration, however, a furious counterattack by Russian Cossacks checked their progress. Chodkiewicz launched a fresh assault from the southern outskirts of the city. Although his troops reached the Kremlin walls, they were driven back a second time. The starving garrison surrendered in November, at which point the Commonwealth army withdrew from Moscow. Through the Treaty of Deulina, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth retained Smolensk and gained a belt of Russian territory that stretched from Belaya to Chernigov.



Showdown at Khotyn

One war followed another for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As part of the Treaty of Busza of 1617, signed by the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian king was under obligation not to interfere in the affairs of Ottoman vassal-states Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania. By interfering in Moldavian affairs, the Commonwealth violated the agreement. Although Iskender Pasha, commander during the victory at Cecora, had shown that he was capable of defeating the Poles, Sultan Osman was keen on enhancing his reputation among his people, and therefore decided to lead the Ottoman imperial army into Moldavia himself in spring 1621.

Sigismund dispatched Chodkiewicz with 35,000 troops to halt the Ottoman juggernaut. The Polish-Lithuanian Sejm (Diet) agreed to pay 20,000 Cossacks to assist the royal army. Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny, hetman of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, saw this as an opportunity to expand the rights of his people,



Left: Polish cavalrymen fight Crimean Tatars, who were allied with the Ottomans

in Bulgaria, and then nearly two more months to reach Khotyn.

Over the course of five weeks outside Khotyn, Osman launched six major assaults against the Commonwealth's fieldworks. The defenders repulsed each attack. Chodkiewicz skilfully used his winged hussars and Cossacks to conduct well-choreographed sorties that inflicted additional casualties on the attacking army. On 28 September, Osman ordered a grand assault, employing the majority of his forces in a bid to break through the Commonwealth's lines. Throughout the long day the Ottomans and Tatars assailed the Commonwealth's defences. When the attack failed, Osman ordered a general retreat. He had little choice, as his troops were on the verge of mutinying.

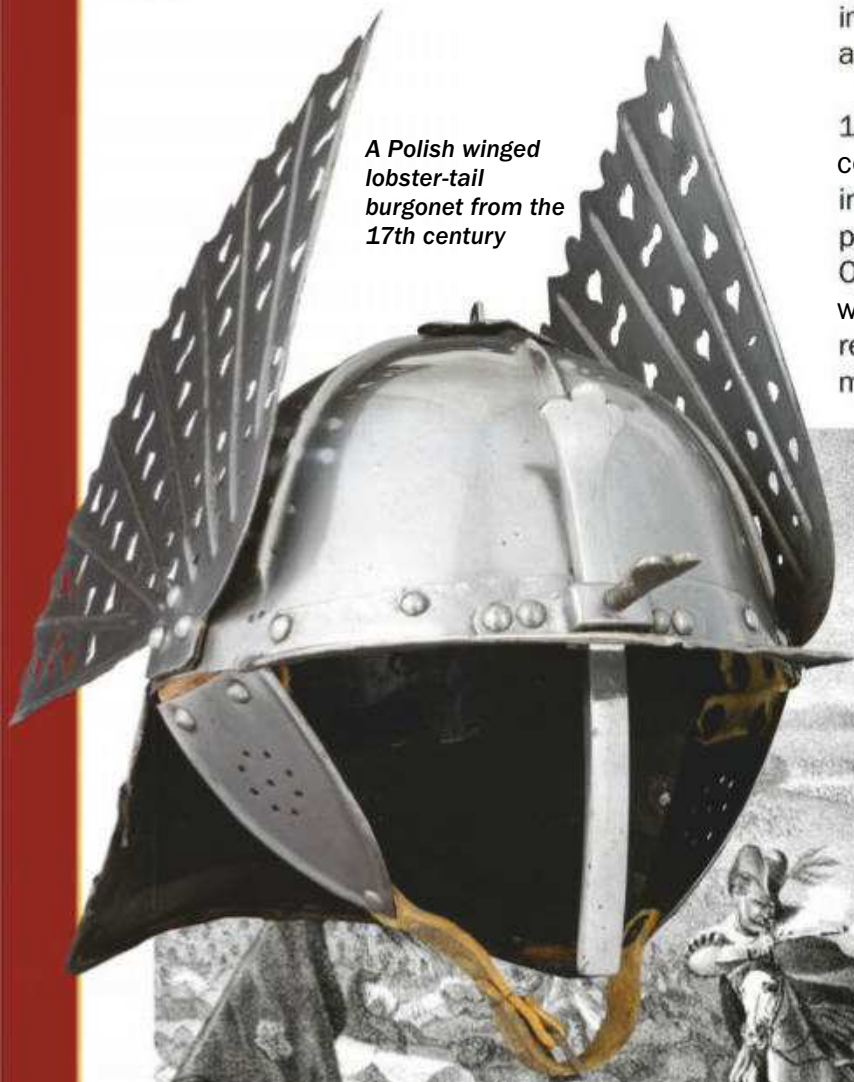
Sadly, Chodkiewicz did not live to see the victory. The aged commander had died of exhaustion four days earlier. Chodkiewicz had given the last full measure of devotion to preserve the Commonwealth from the ravages of the Ottoman force.

During the course of his illustrious career, Chodkiewicz had fought in three major wars and won distinction in each. The stakes had been great in his last battle, and he had emerged victorious. Through his inspired leadership, steadfast courage and creative tactics over the course of his distinguished career, he is rightfully regarded as one of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's greatest hetmen.

so he fielded twice that number. When the Poles and Lithuanians rendezvoused with the Cossacks at the fortress of Khotyn on the Dniester River just across the Moldavian frontier, Chodkiewicz had 75,000 troops. The Commonwealth army immediately began entrenching in preparation for an Ottoman attack.

That attack was slow in coming. The 120,000-strong Ottoman army, half of which consisted of Tatar auxiliaries, departed Istanbul in May and advanced at an agonisingly slow pace that was uncharacteristic of previous Ottoman armies. A combination of inclement weather and slipshod bridging at river crossings resulted in interminable delays. It took two months for the Ottomans to reach the Danube

A Polish winged lobster-tail burgonet from the 17th century



Chodkiewicz led the Polish winged hussars in a massed charge at Kircholm in 1605 that routed the Swedish army



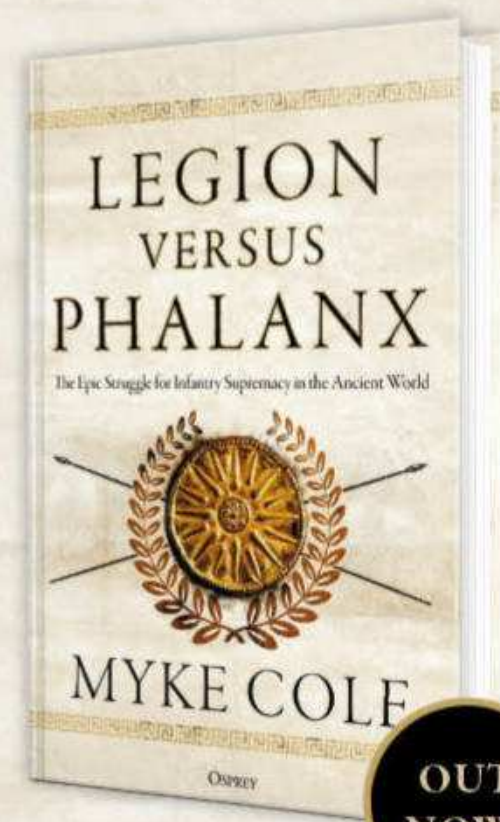
Artefact images: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Combining his novelist's flair for drama with an ancient historian's eye for detail, Myke Cole presents a lively history of the Ancient World's defining clash of military formations...

LEGION VERSUS PHALANX

From the time of Ancient Sumeria, the heavy infantry phalanx dominated the battlefield, presenting an impenetrable wall of wood and metal to the enemy. Until, that is, the Roman legion emerged to challenge them as masters of infantry battle.

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MATILDA II

Developed in the mid 1930s, this infantry tank was conceived to provide direct fire support for troops on the ground, emphasising armour protection WORDS MIKE HASKEW

2-POUNDER GUN

The QF 2-pounder (0.9kg) gun was developed by the Royal Arms Arsenal at Woolwich as a turret-mounted main weapon for tanks and a towed anti-tank weapon.

CREW COMPARTMENT

The Matilda II driver sat forward and centred in the tank crew compartment. The gear selector was installed to his right and the steering lever at his left.

When the Matilda II Infantry Tank, initially known as the A12 Infantry Tank Mk. II, reached the front lines of the British Army in 1940, its armour protection and two-pounder (40mm, 1.6 inch) main gun made it a formidable weapon, capable of defeating much of the German and Italian armour in the field at the time. Although it shares a common name with its predecessor, the Matilda I, the similarity generally ends there. The Matilda I was intended as an interim design until the Matilda II became available in substantial numbers. The Matilda II was developed with infantry support in mind – speed was a secondary consideration while firepower and armour protection took precedent.

As the Matilda II was deployed to France, it proved impervious to early German anti-tank weapons and vulnerable primarily to heavy-calibre field artillery. Its rugged durability made it a favourite among tank crews, and the Matilda (the designation Matilda II was dropped when the smaller Matilda I was withdrawn from service in 1940) gained fame in the North African theatre during World War II, earning the nickname 'Queen of the desert'. Soon, however, the pre-eminence of the Matilda was eclipsed by heavier German tanks, although it remained in service for the duration of the conflict.

ENGINES

A pair of six-cylinder, seven-litre water-cooled AEC engines, the same powerplants that drove London city buses, powered the Matilda II tank. An alternative to the AEC diesel engines powering the Matilda II were a pair of Leyland six-cylinder petrol engines that generated slightly more horsepower.

TURRET

The Matilda II turret was hydraulically powered, and three crewmen, including the commander, gunner and loader, were positioned in the rather cramped space.

“THE MATILDA II WAS DEVELOPED WITH INFANTRY SUPPORT IN MIND – SPEED WAS A SECONDARY CONSIDERATION WHILE FIREPOWER AND ARMOUR PROTECTION TOOK PRECEDENT”

ARMoured SKIRTS

Heavy armour side skirts and mud chutes protected the wheels and tracks of the Matilda II, and improved mobility in difficult terrain and weather conditions.

MATILDA II INFANTRY TANK

COMMISSIONED: 1939 **ORIGIN:** UK
LENGTH: 5.6M (18 FT 5IN) **RANGE:** 257KM (160MI)
ENGINE: 2X LEYLAND 6-CYLINDER PETROL ENGINES OR 2X 6-CYLINDER AEC DIESEL ENGINES
PRIMARY WEAPON: 1X ORDNANCE QF 2-POUNDER (0.9-KG) GUN **SECONDARY WEAPON:** 1X 7.92MM (0.3IN) BESA MACHINE GUN **CREW:** 4

Men and women on the factory floor move a gun mantlet and its encased weapon into place in the turret of a Matilda II

“ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY VICKERS AND THE DESIGN DEPARTMENT OF THE ROYAL ARMS ARSENAL AT WOOLWICH, THE 2-POUNDER ENTERED PRODUCTION IN 1936, AND MORE THAN 12,000 WERE PRODUCED BY 1944”



ARMAMENT

The primary weapon of the Matilda II was the Ordnance QF 2-pounder (0.9-kilogram) gun, developed both as a tank-mounted main weapon and a carriage-mounted anti-tank gun. Originally developed by Vickers and the design department of the Royal Arms Arsenal at Woolwich, the two-pounder entered production in 1936, and more than 12,000 were produced by 1944. As World War II progressed, the firepower of the 2-pounder gave way to heavier calibre weapons. However, early in the conflict the weapon was effective against enemy armour. A single turret-mounted Besa 7.92mm (0.3 inch) machine gun provided fire support.



This Matilda II is preserved in a museum. The slightly recessed mantlet and the heavy armour side skirts are clearly visible



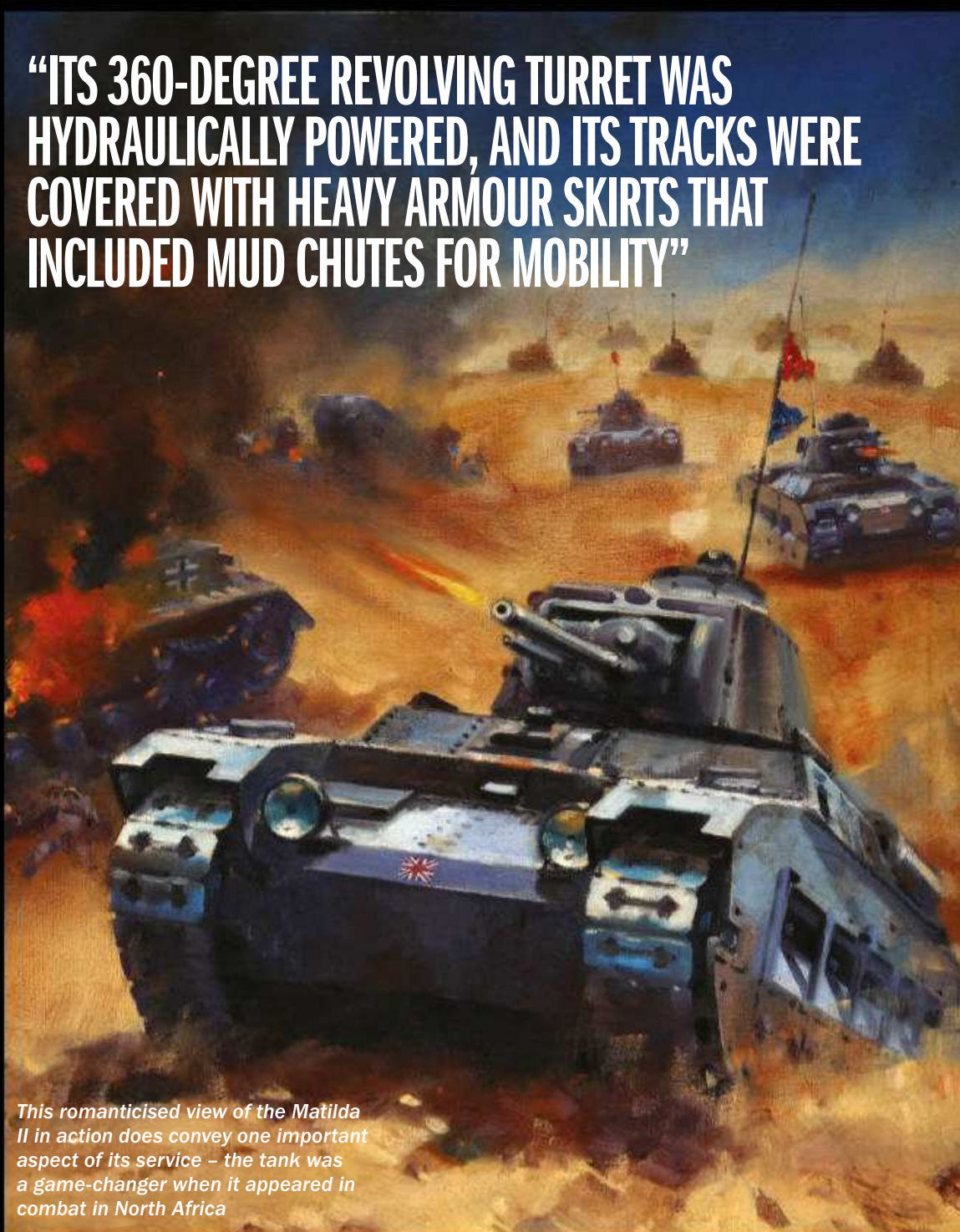
DESIGN

With its design beginning in 1936 at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, and manufactured by Vulcan Foundry, the Matilda II was a large infantry support tank based on the conceptions of armoured warfare pioneers Major General Percy Hobart and Captain B.H. Liddell Hart. Weighing 27 long tons, the Matilda II incorporated elements of the earlier A7 medium tank. Its heavy armour protection ranged up to 75mm (2.95 inches) on the turret glacis. Its 360-degree revolving turret was hydraulically powered. Its tracks were covered with heavy armour skirts, including mud chutes for mobility.



Fresh off the factory floor, Matilda II tanks are transported on flatbed rail cars for transport to a port of departure in Britain and then to the front lines

“ITS 360-DEGREE REVOLVING TURRET WAS HYDRAULICALLY POWERED, AND ITS TRACKS WERE COVERED WITH HEAVY ARMOUR SKIRTS THAT INCLUDED MUD CHUTES FOR MOBILITY”

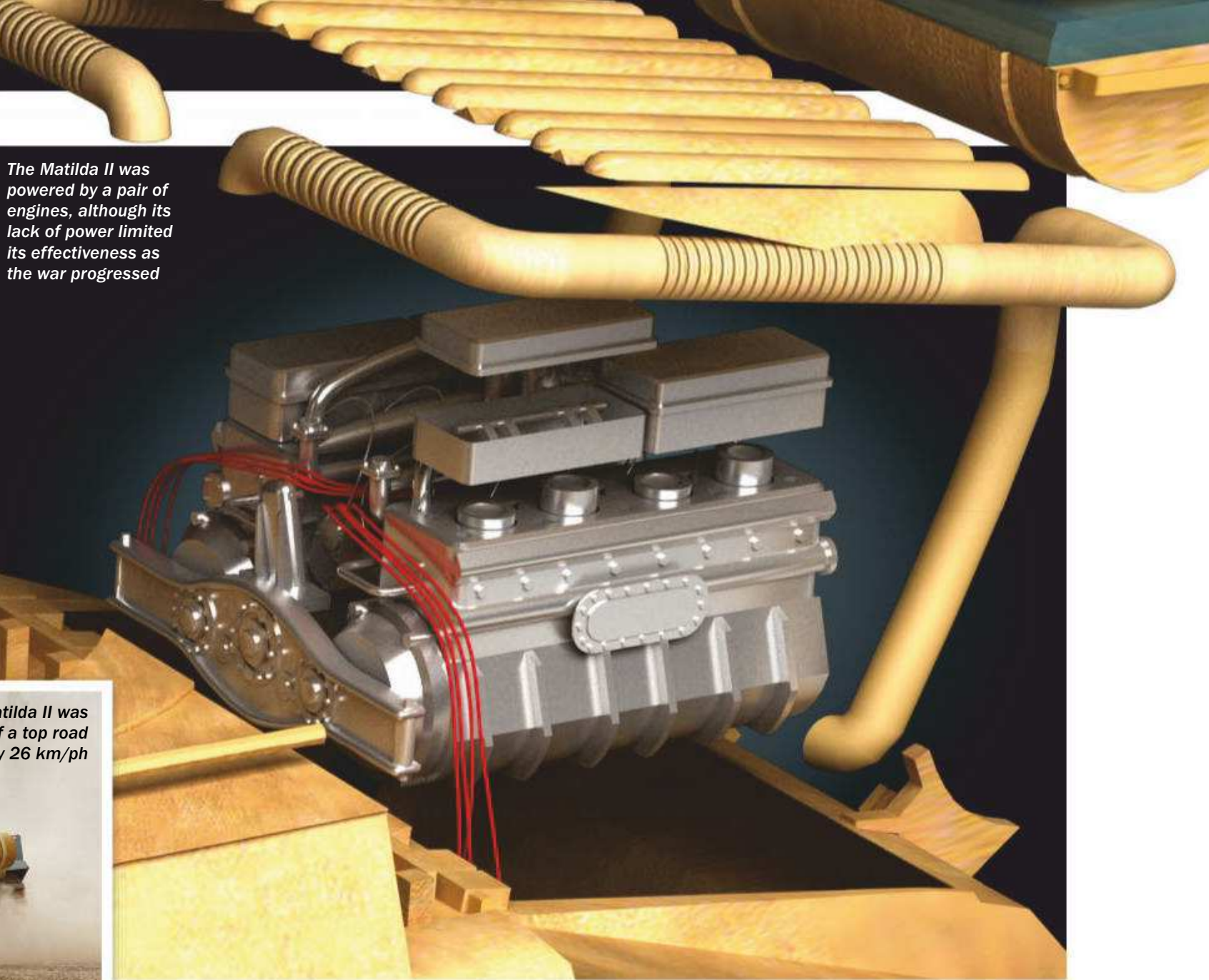


This romanticised view of the Matilda II in action does convey one important aspect of its service – the tank was a game-changer when it appeared in combat in North Africa

ENGINE

The Matilda II was powered either by a pair of straight six-cylinder, water-cooled, seven-litre AEC diesel engines – the same that powered London buses – and generating 87 British horsepower, or two Leyland six-cylinder petrol engines generating 95 British horsepower. The tank was slow, capable of a top road speed of only 26 kilometres per hour (16 miles per hour) and a mere 14 kilometres per hour (nine miles per hour) cross-country, and its lack of an adequate powerplant limited operations as WWII progressed. A six-speed Wilson epicyclic preselector gearbox served as the transmission.

The Matilda II was powered by a pair of engines, although its lack of power limited its effectiveness as the war progressed



The Matilda II was capable of a top road speed of only 26 km/ph



COCKPIT

The interior of the Matilda II featured the driver seated forward and centred in the crew compartment. The steering lever was located to the left, and the gear selector to the right. The turret accommodated the commander, gunner and loader, while the engines were positioned to the rear. Crewmen gained entry via the driver's hull hatch or the primary hatch atop the turret. Early in World War II the Matilda's armour protection made the vehicle highly survivable for crews. However, much heavier enemy weapons were later developed, eliminated this appealing feature.

Right: British Army tankers clamber aboard their Matilda II. Note the driver sliding into the snug hatch above his position in the hull

“EARLY IN WORLD WAR II THE MATILDA'S ARMOUR PROTECTION MADE THE VEHICLE HIGHLY SURVIVABLE FOR CREWS”



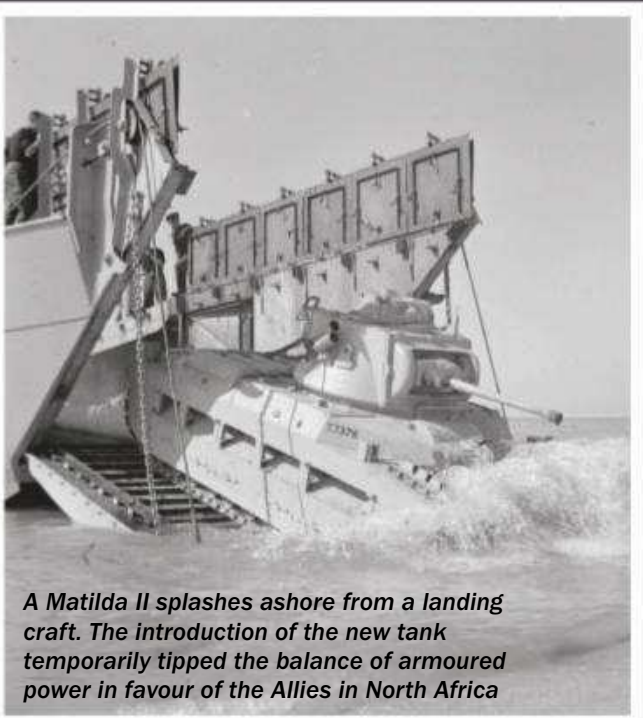
SERVICE HISTORY

A POWERFUL TANK EARLY IN THE WAR, IT WAS LATER OUTCLASSED BY AXIS ARMOUR AND GUNS

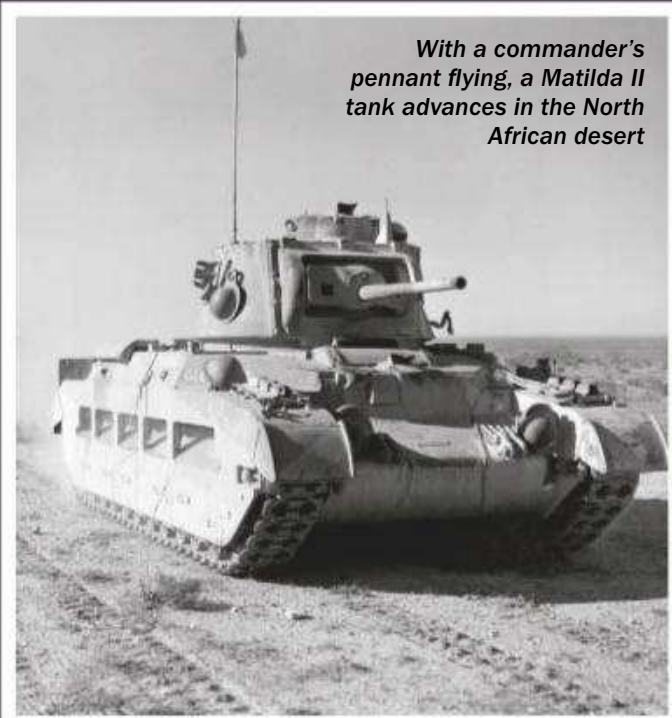
In May 1940, a contingent of 50 Matilda II tanks were deployed to France, although scarcely half were available for combat at any given time. The excellent range of the Matilda's 2-pounder gun achieved stunning results at the Battle of Arras on 21 May, as 16 Matildas inflicted heavy losses on the German 7th Panzer Division under General

Erwin Rommel. The Matilda tide was only turned when the Germans employed 88mm (3.5 inch) anti-aircraft guns in an anti-tank role.

The Matilda is particularly remembered for its service early in the North African Campaign during World War II. Outclassing Axis tanks, particularly inferior Italian vehicles, the Matilda earned the nickname 'Queen of the desert'. Matilda crews destroyed half the armoured complement of the German 15th Panzer Division at the Battle of Point 175 during Operation Crusader in 1941. However, dozens were lost to improved German anti-tank guns and armoured vehicles during Operation Battleaxe.



A Matilda II splashes ashore from a landing craft. The introduction of the new tank temporarily tipped the balance of armoured power in favour of the Allies in North Africa

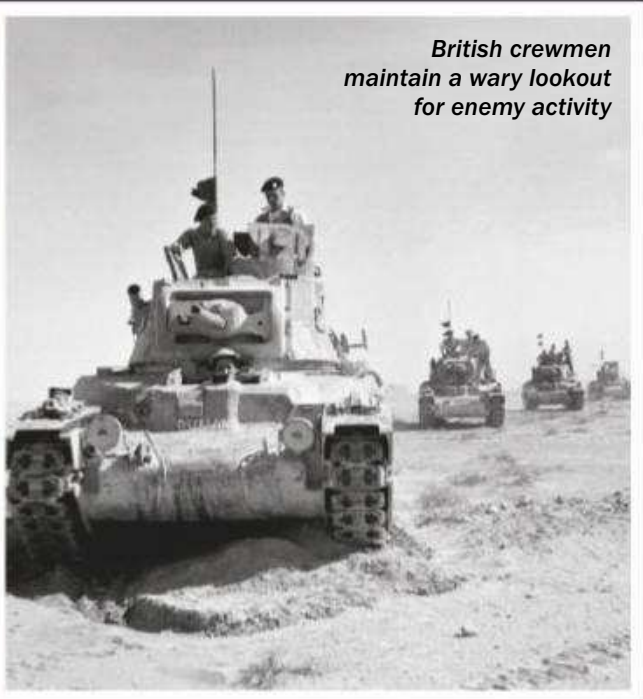


With a commander's pennant flying, a Matilda II tank advances in the North African desert

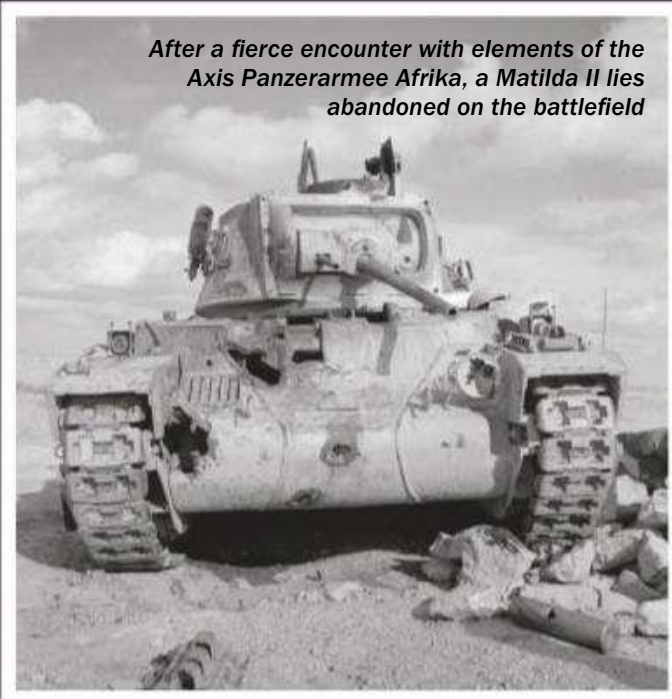


Matilda II tanks fan out for offensive operations in North Africa

“MATILDA CREWS DESTROYED HALF THE ARMoured COMPLEMENT OF THE GERMAN 15TH PANZER DIVISION AT THE BATTLE OF POINT 175 DURING OPERATION CRUSADER IN 1941”

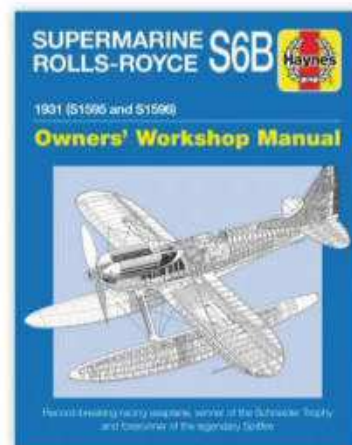
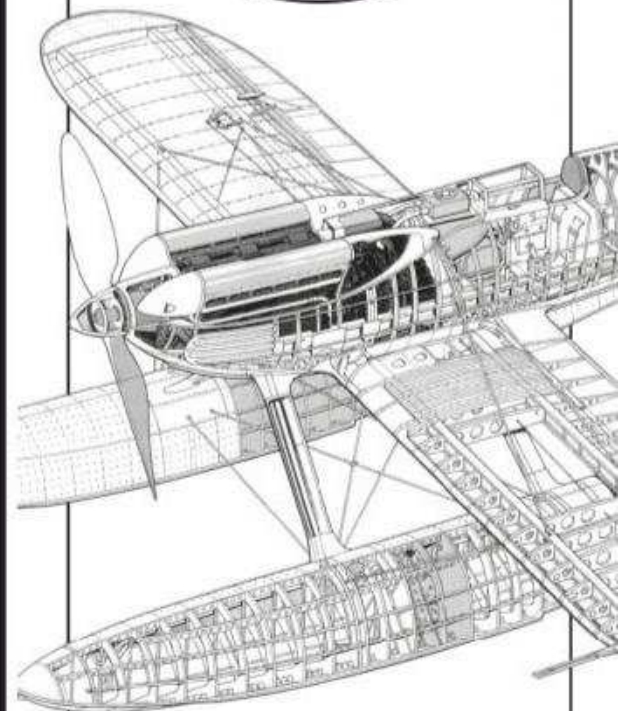


British crewmen maintain a wary lookout for enemy activity

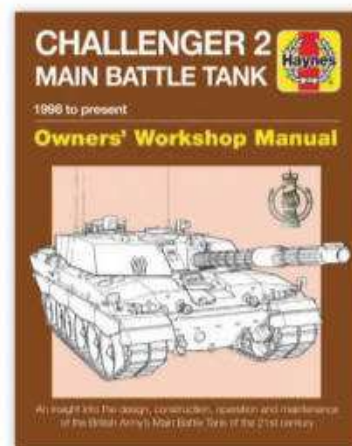


After a fierce encounter with elements of the Axis Panzerarmee Afrika, a Matilda II lies abandoned on the battlefield

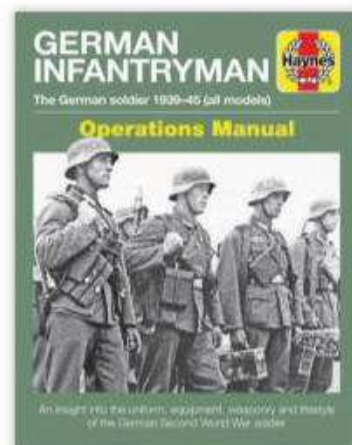
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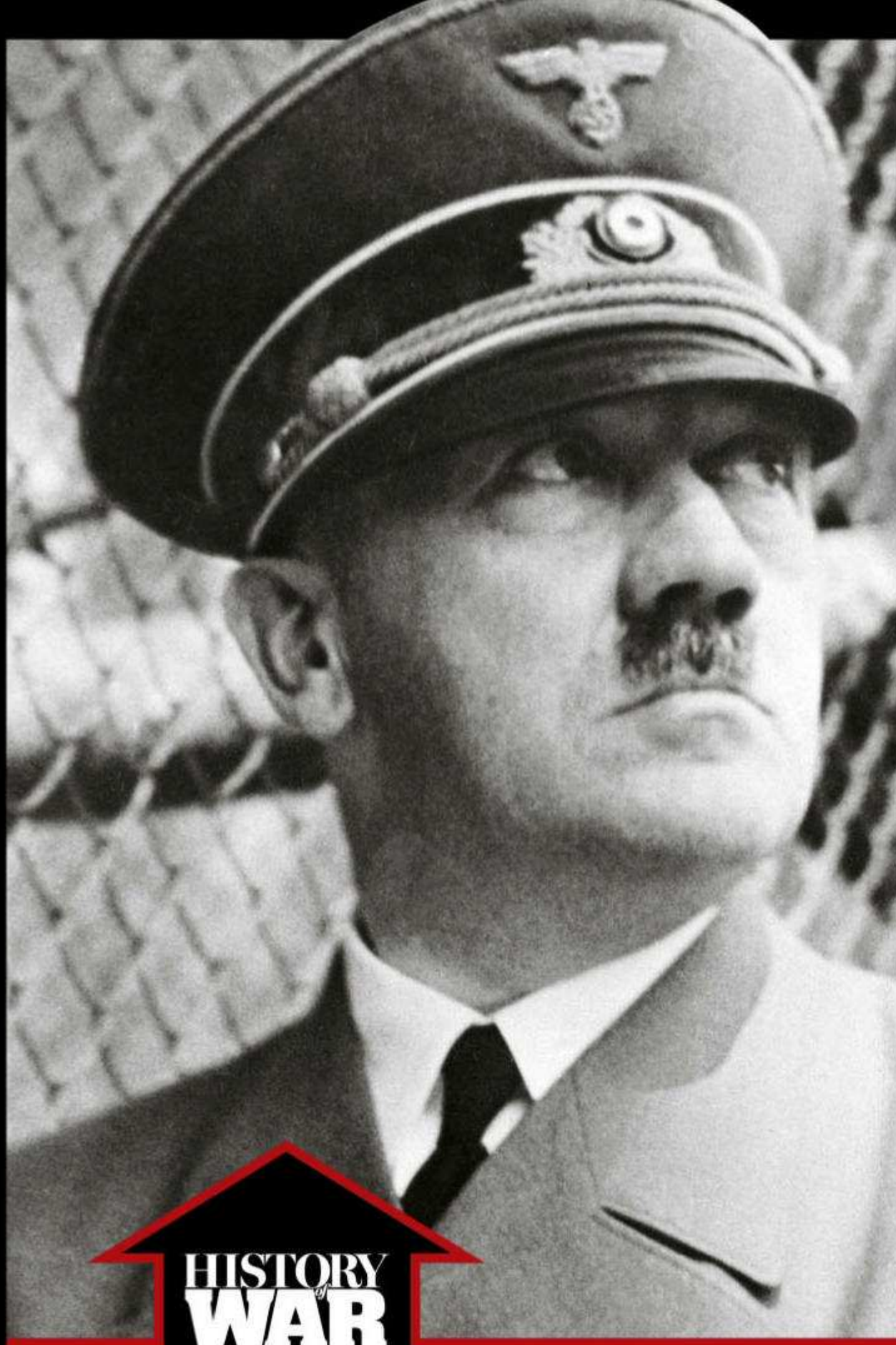
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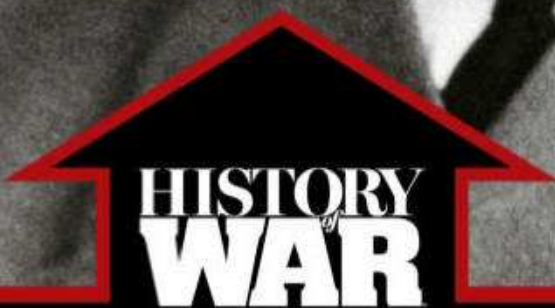


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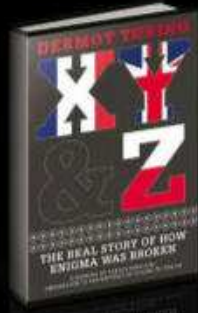
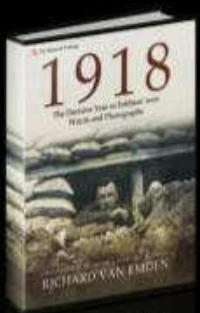
82 PADDY ASHDOWN ON THE HEROIC GERMAN RESISTANCE TO HITLER



HOMEFRONT



80
"WHEN WAS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN?"
ANDY SAUNDERS DISCUSSES



88
THE LATEST MILITARY HISTORY BOOKS
ON THE SHELVES REVIEWED



94
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WHEN WAS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN?

On 18 June 1940, Winston Churchill told the House of Commons, “What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin.” But just when did that momentous battle begin and end? **Andy Saunders** discusses why the answer may not be straightforward



Andy Saunders is a writer and researcher specialising in historic aviation. He co-founded Tangmere aviation museum and is a regular consultant for TV & film projects.

During the latter half of 1941, the Air Ministry published a small HMSO booklet called *The Battle Of Britain – August To October 1940*. Here, for the first time, was an authorised narrative that also set the dates of the battle, stating authoritatively that it had commenced on 8 August with the launch of sustained air attacks. However, if the Air Ministry believed the Battle of Britain began on 8 August and ended on 31 October, why is it now officially marked as commencing on 10 July?

The truth of the matter is that the ‘battle’, per se, was an entirely artificial affair, with its date parameters set by the British. In any event, the German view was that there was no such thing as the Battle of Britain. Instead, the fighting in the summer of 1940 was part of continuing air operations against Britain, commencing in October 1939 and continuing, in different phases, for the duration of the war. And they had a point.

Of course, given Churchill’s speech on 18 June, pronouncing “...the Battle of Britain is about to begin”, one must reasonably assume that its commencement was considered to have been soon thereafter. Certainly, Air Ministry officials compiling the 1941 booklet must have looked retrospectively at the air fighting over Britain in 1940, concluding that it all began on 8 August. And there was logic to selecting that day – the date that saw the heaviest air fighting of the war so far. So why, and when, did the battle’s commencement get moved to 10 July?

Some months after relinquishing command, the former commander-in-chief of RAF Fighter Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, was invited by the Secretary of State for Air to write a dispatch on The Battle of Britain, and the finished work was submitted on 20 August 1941. By this stage, however, the Air Ministry account had already been published, and in the preamble to his dispatch, Dowding acknowledged that fact. However, his dispatch was eventually published in the *London Gazette* on 11 September 1946, setting in stone what became the battle’s ‘official’ dates. But what Dowding had to say on the matter is both interesting and revealing.

“It is difficult to fix the exact date on which the ‘Battle of Britain’ can be said to have begun. Operations of various kinds merged into one another almost insensibly, and there are grounds for choosing the date of 8th August, on which was made the first attack in force against laid objectives in this country, as the beginning of the Battle.”

Dowding then went on to discuss the rationale for his selection of dates, pointing out the varied Luftwaffe attacks against Channel convoys during July as probably constituting “the beginning of the German offensive”. Ultimately, he settled on a commencement date: “I have therefore, somewhat arbitrarily, chosen the events of the 10th July as the opening of the Battle. Although many attacks had previously been made on convoys, and even on land objectives such as Portland, the 10th July saw the employment by the Germans of the first really big formation (70 aircraft) intended primarily to bring our Fighter Defence to battle on a large scale.”

The opening date was set. However, Dowding’s passing mention of an attack on Portland is significant. In my opinion, the Portland attack on 4 July would have been a far more appropriate date to select for the Battle of Britain’s commencement. The truth of the matter, however, was that selecting this particular date would have been difficult for Dowding to countenance.

On 4 July 1940, Junkers Ju 87 ‘Stukas’ launched an attack in force against Royal Navy installations at Portland, specifically

“THE ‘BATTLE’, PER SE, WAS AN ENTIRELY ARTIFICIAL AFFAIR, WITH ITS DATE PARAMETERS SET BY THE BRITISH. IN ANY EVENT, THE GERMAN VIEW WAS THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN”

targeting HMS Foylebank in the harbour. During a devastating attack, Foylebank (ironically an anti-aircraft ship) was sunk, killing 176 of the ship’s company. On board, Able Seaman Jack Mantle battled valiantly at his gun but was mortally wounded, earning a posthumous Victoria Cross. However, he was one of very few defenders and, in fact, RAF Fighter Command didn’t manage to get a single aircraft airborne.

Adding to the debacle, an ‘Outbound Atlantic’ convoy was also attacked in the Channel, resulting in heavy losses. Furious, Admiral Max Horton called it all “a disgraceful episode” as he railed against the lack of air cover. Meanwhile, Churchill issued an ‘Action This Day’ memo demanding assurances “that Air [the RAF] is contributing effectively”.

Unfortunately, there had been failings of the Chain Home radar coverage coupled with confusion about returning British aircraft, and this resulted in Fighter Command’s failure to get off the ground. Under the circumstances, albeit that the radar network was not part of Dowding’s command, it would have been difficult for him to have selected 4 July, despite the fact that Luftwaffe action that day more pointedly indicates this as a more definitive start date than any other. After all, he could hardly single this out as the start date when RAF fighters were not involved. Whether or not Fighter Command participated, it was certainly a more significant day of action than the lacklustre and desultory affair that took place on 10 July.

On such arbitrary dates, then, was the Battle of Britain officially declared to have been fought. Even its ‘end date’ of 31 October is subjective, bearing little relation to what was happening in the air.

By a stroke of Dowding’s pen, Squadron Leader ‘Archie’ McKellar (killed on 1 November) was not deemed a casualty of the Battle of Britain on Westminster Abbey’s Roll of Honour. Squadron Leader George Lott, shot down and blinded in one eye on 9 July, was denied a place as one of ‘The Few’ by a matter of hours. In an interview in 1979, Lott remarked, “Nobody had told the bloody Germans that the Battle of Britain hadn’t started yet!”

British children shelter in a trench in Kent, 1940



Image: Getty

Ashdown's new book explores the high-ranking German conspiracies to remove Hitler

NEIN! STANDING UP TO HITLER

AN INTERVIEW WITH PADDY ASHDOWN

Speaking about his new book at the Malvern Festival of Military History, **Lord Ashdown** reveals the extraordinary story of high-level German resistance against the Third Reich

WORDS TOM GARNER

Occupied Europe became famous for its various resistance networks to Nazi tyranny, but the fight against Adolf Hitler's regime inside Germany has received less attention. Paddy Ashdown's new book *Nein!* tells the story of those within Hitler's high command who became committed to destroying the German leader both before and during World War II.

This powerful internal resistance to Nazism included many plots to kill Hitler, as well as the systematic passage of military secrets to the Allies through determined spy rings. Those authorising these actions included generals and the head of the Abwehr (German military intelligence), Vice-Admiral Wilhelm Canaris.

Speaking at the Malvern Festival of Military History, Ashdown revealed the plotters' motives, Allied complacency and how the dangerous world of the 1930s-1940s echoes our own unstable times.

What aspects of the German resistance does the book cover?

This is not about the 'small people' in the German resistance like the White Rose student movement or Georg Elser, although they were remarkable too. This is about people at the very top of Hitler's regime, including his generals and the head of his spy service. From 1934-35 onwards, they quite deliberately set out to frustrate his plans, attempted to assassinate him on several occasions, passed his plans on to the Allies to tell them what he was going to do and sue for an early peace if that was possible.

It's an extraordinary story, but it has almost been totally forgotten, and there is a reason for that. After WWII, it was inconvenient for us to believe that there were good Germans. They were not flawless but they did understand the evil he posed and understood it early on. I think it's time to bring it back to light, not as an alternative history but a complementary part of World War II.

What were the motives of those who resisted the Third Reich?

They were often very strongly motivated by religious principles. Most of them were Lutherans and many were also Catholics, including Wilhelm Canaris and Claus von

Stauffenberg. It's a bit romantic, but I don't think it's inaccurate to say that their Germany consisted of Beethoven, Schiller and Goethe. It wasn't the Germany of Hitler and it was so offensive to all of the basic things that they believed existed in a broadly liberal society. They felt that they could do nothing other than oppose Hitler by treachery.

One of the key moments in the book was an attempted coup to remove Hitler in September 1938. How did that plot unfold?

In August 1938 Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, the personal representative of the German General Staff, flew to London about six weeks before the invasion of the Sudetenland. He saw [Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs] Robert Vansittart and Winston Churchill and told them the date of the invasion was 28 September. He also told them that a coup was being assembled and that if the British stood up to Hitler, the Germans would remove him. Churchill rang Lord Halifax and drafted a letter for Kleist-Schmenzin to take back [to Germany] saying that the British would oppose Hitler if the invasion happened.

September, the diplomat Erich Kordt went through the back door of 10 Downing Street and confirmed the invasion date and planned coup

to Halifax. Halifax gave him a rather equivocal answer, but on 28 September the coup was in place with some 60 armed 'desperadoes', including army officers. They were armed by Canaris and were ready in the Reich Chancellery. With a reserve of about 150 men, the plan was to capture Hitler and have him declared mad by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's father, who was a psychologist. There was also a little coup within the coup that would have killed him on the way.

During that day, ammunition rounds were being pushed into magazines by the plotters with literally 30 minutes to go. However, in the last half-hour Chamberlain proposed the final meeting for the Munich Agreement. Suddenly, the Sudetenland was given away without a shot being fired, and the coup collapsed.

This coup was backed by all the German generals in the army, all the German commanders of the forces in Berlin as well as the capital's chief of police and the Foreign Office. This was huge high-level support.

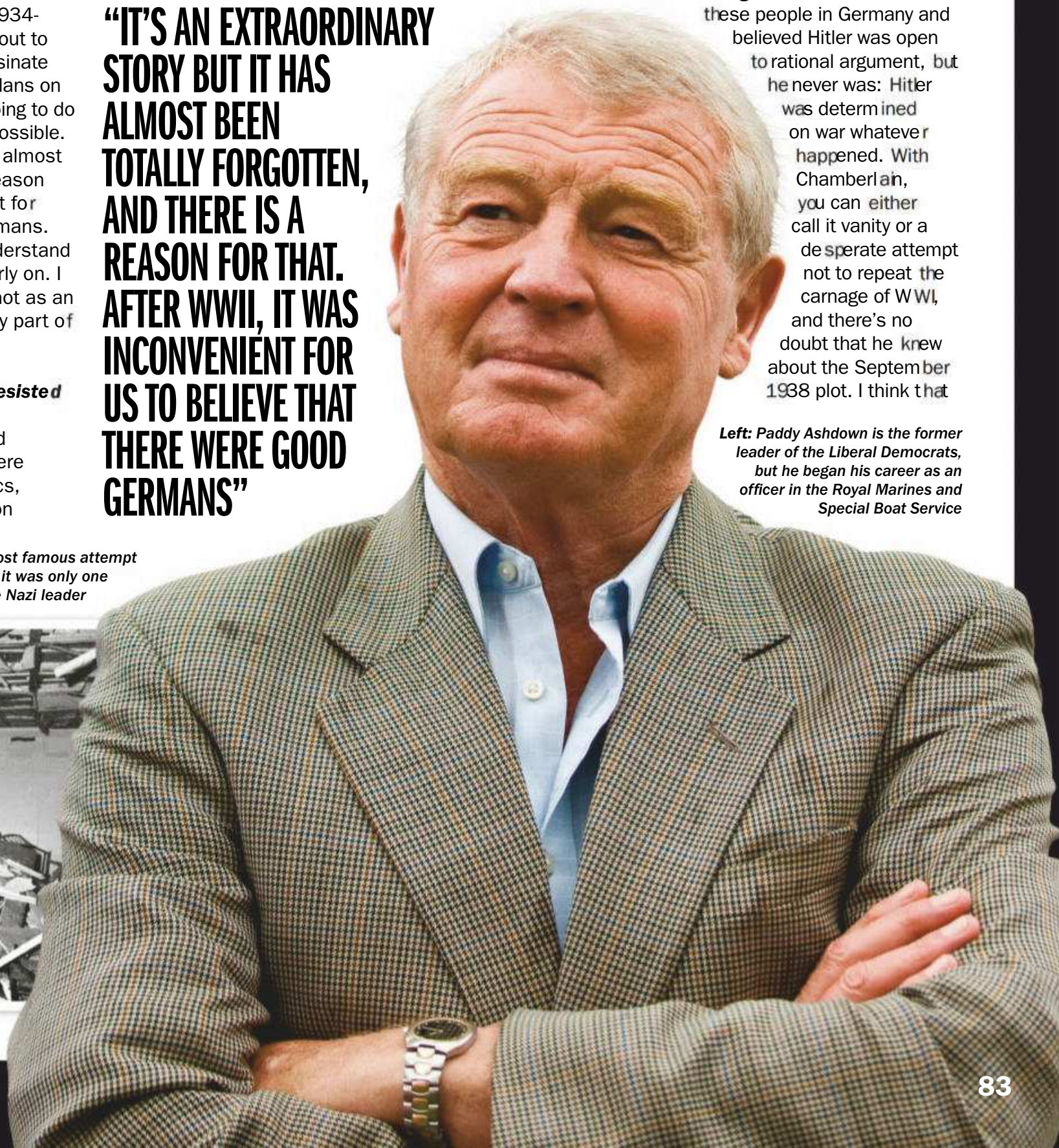
To what extent was the British government's dismissal of repeated German warnings responsible for the outbreak of war and its subsequent course?

Before the war, Chamberlain saw himself as a great peacemaker, which was not a sinful or evil thing to do. He didn't trust these people in Germany and believed Hitler was open to rational argument, but he never was: Hitler was determined on war whatever happened. With Chamberlain, you can either call it vanity or a desperate attempt not to repeat the carnage of WWI, and there's no doubt that he knew about the September 1938 plot. I think that

"IT'S AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY BUT IT HAS ALMOST BEEN TOTALLY FORGOTTEN, AND THERE IS A REASON FOR THAT. AFTER WWII, IT WAS INCONVENIENT FOR US TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WERE GOOD GERMANS"

Left: Paddy Ashdown is the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, but he began his career as an officer in the Royal Marines and Special Boat Service

Below: The failed 20 July plot of 1944 is the most famous attempt to assassinate Hitler, but Ashdown reveals that it was only one of several military conspiracies to eliminate the Nazi leader

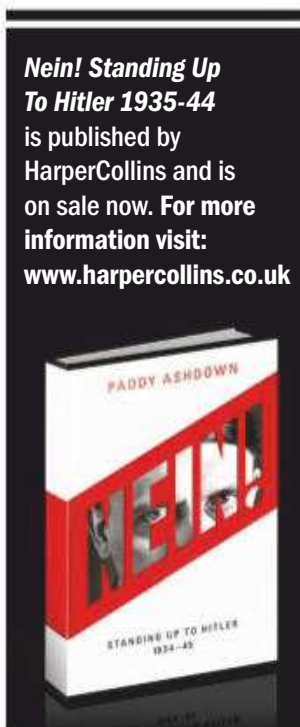




One of Wilhelm Canaris's most significant acts to undermine Hitler was to personally persuade Francisco Franco to not join the Axis powers or allow German troops passage through Spain



Lord Ashdown speaking about *Nein!* with *History of War's* Features Editor Tom Garner during a live Q&A session at the Malvern Festival of Military History



Nein! Standing Up to Hitler 1935-44 is published by HarperCollins and is on sale now. For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk

GERMANY'S RESISTANCE

ADMIRAL WILHELM CANARIS

As head of the Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris was one of the most important members of the German resistance against Adolf Hitler.



CHIEF OF STAFF 2ND ARMY HENNING VON TRESCKOW

A decorated WWI veteran, von Tresckow was variously described by the Gestapo as the "evil spirit" or "prime mover" behind the 20 July plot in 1944.



CARL GOERDELER

High-level German resistance also had a significant civilian component, including the politician Carl Goerdeler, who would have served as chancellor of Germany had the 20 July plot succeeded



DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an Abwehr agent who staunchly resisted the Nazis. Executed in April 1945, he is commemorated in the Gallery of 20th-century Martyrs in Westminster Abbey



he flew to Munich in part to frustrate the plot and believed there was a better chance of avoiding war by having the peace conference. This was a catastrophic misjudgment of Hitler's personality.

As for British Intelligence, the Venlo Incident devastated them in November 1939. This catastrophe was an extraordinary counter-intelligence coup by Reinhard Heydrich when he captured two British Intelligence officers and it wracked MI6 across Europe. It was deeply embarrassing to MI6 and Chamberlain when it was discovered that he had been seeking an early peace around that time. After that incident, every piece of information the British received from the Germans was taken to be another example of misinformation. You'll find that with intelligence services today, where people don't believe the information they're receiving because they think it is too good to be true.

Admiral Wilhelm Canaris emerges as one of the most important resistance figures in the book. What are your thoughts on him?

He's the most multilayered character. He had an extraordinarily adventurous youth and became one of the prime movers of the extreme right-wing movement in Germany, but he was a man who was constantly changing. It's classic for a spy chief to be a chameleon who is always changing his position, but it wasn't from opportunism. Towards the end of his life it was from a position of moral commitment.

As head of the Abwehr he was an extraordinarily powerful figure. However, he became a sort of hermit, waiting for his close friend Heydrich to take him away to the gallows.

This was a result of strain, duplicity and serving a master like Hitler while also undermining him.

He's a very strange personality, but he is fascinating and mercurial. He was greatly loved by those who served under him and admired for his moral courage. Nevertheless, he was undoubtedly capable of doing things that were not always good in the short term in order to pursue a moral course in the long run.

What is your opinion of the high-level Germans who plotted Hitler's downfall?

These were not flawless people. They were, in part, involved in getting Hitler to power and the army officers were partially complicit in turning a blind eye to some of the slaughters. Nevertheless, they had the moral courage to see the resistance through to the very end, at the cost of their lives. It seems to me to be a shocking tragedy, if not a scandal, that their memory has completely vanished.

I also have to say that younger officers like Henning von Tresckow showed outstanding moral courage, but they were almost all slaughtered or committed suicide after the 20 July plot in 1944.

"IN THE END THE ENLIGHTENED ALWAYS WIN THROUGH AND THE AGE OF POPULISM WILL BE REPLACED BY ONE THAT WE CAN HAVE EASIER CONFIDENCE IN"

If they hadn't died I really think they would have been part of a golden generation when Germany was reconstructed after the war.

You have previously said that "the parallels between the 1930s and today are frightening". To what extent do you think that is true?

We do have stable ages, and we have clear moral compasses by which to carry out our public and private actions. There are also moments in history when these are swept aside. We call this an 'Age of Populism' and I think it is. I am struck by the similarities between the 1930s and the age we live in. Having said that I do enter a strong caveat.

First of all, I'm not comparing anybody with Hitler. He was utterly unique in his evil and combined an almost genius for the management of power. There is no such person around today intent on war, although one might argue that the conditions are ripe for one to emerge. The second thing is that the Weimar Republic was a very rickety form of democracy. Our democracies are not like that and they could not be so easily overturned today. I am sure that this could not happen in the same way that it happened in the 1930s.

I'm also quite sure that in the end the enlightened always win through, and the age of populism will be replaced by one that we can have easier confidence in. In drawing these parallels I'm not saying that we are bound to the same destination. We need to remember that even in the worst of times there are people who have great moral courage and are prepared to risk everything.

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MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Explore Wilfred Owen's Shropshire, festive events at the National Army Museum & the restoration of one of D-Day's last surviving landing craft

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery is hosting exhibitions about WWI and Wilfred Owen

WILFRED OWEN 100

DISCOVER EXHIBITIONS, INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES AND WALKS AS SHROPSHIRE COMMEMORATES ITS CELEBRATED WAR POET

Although he was only 25 years old when he was killed in action in France on 4 November 1918, Wilfred Owen is today one of Britain's most celebrated war poets. He served as a second lieutenant in the 2nd Manchester Regiment during World War I and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery. Owen was not just physically courageous but a talented writer whose haunting poems on the horrors of trench warfare have largely defined how the war is perceived today. His literary standing is so eminent that two volumes of his handwritten verse are archived in the British Library alongside the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare.

Owen was from Shropshire, and 100 years after his death his home county is commemorating one of its most celebrated sons. 'Wilfred Owen 100' (WO100) is an events program that commemorates the centenary of Owen's death. It has already seen an unveiling of a statue to Owen in his hometown of Oswestry on 20 October 2018, but there is much to see around Shropshire. The county is famous for its beautiful scenery and charming towns, which now provide an incredible backdrop to uncover Owen's story.

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery is running WWI exhibitions as part of WO100 until the end of January 2019. Its 'Open Art Exhibition' is a variety of media by local artists whose themes are their response to Owen's work. The museum's 'Strange Meeting' exhibition offers

additional visual interpretations of quotes from 14 of Owen's poems.

Park Hall Countryside Experience near Oswestry is an ideal place for families or school parties to get an introduction to Owen's war. This rural attraction houses 'Trenches through the Ages', which is a re-created system of military trenches, including from WWI. For young people who are only just discovering the events of 1914-18, this is an interactive experience that provides a fascinating counterpoint to Owen's own experiences.

There are also two walks that are inspired by Owen. The 'Wilfred Owen Town Trail' in Oswestry starts at the railway station where his father Tom worked and finishes at Plas Wilmot, the house where Owen was born in 1893. The 'Tracks to the Trenches' walk in Shrewsbury is even more involving. Beginning at Tom Owen's later workplace at the town's railway station, the walk leads to the family home, where Owen's parents received the tragic news of their son's death on Armistice Day 1918. The walk then concludes at Shrewsbury Abbey, where Owen is commemorated on a memorial called 'Symmetry'. Owen's name also appears on a 'Great War' memorial tablet inside the abbey.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: SHROPSHIREREMEMBERS.ORG.UK

Wilfred Owen's most famous poems include 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'Anthem For Doomed Youth', 'Strange Meeting' and 'Futility'

RESCUING A D-DAY LANDING CRAFT

A UNIQUE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT VESSEL, LCT 7074 HAS SECURED FUNDING FOR ITS RESTORATION BY THE UK NATIONAL LOTTERY



LCT 7074 pictured during its wartime service



D-Day veterans gather in front of LCT 7074 at the National Museum of the Royal Navy

A bid by the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) to conserve and move Britain's last surviving D-Day landing craft tank (LCT) has been backed by a £4.7 million National Lottery grant, awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

LCT 7074 was one of more than 800 LCTs that took part in the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944. Each vessel was capable of carrying ten tanks or other heavy vehicles. Fewer than ten are believed to still exist, and of those, LCT 7074 is the only one left in Britain. It had been sunk and left semi-derelict in Birkenhead before it was rescued by the NMRN and moved to Portsmouth, where it now resides.

With funding approved for the project 'Resurrecting a D-Day Hero', LCT 7074 now has a sustainable future. It will be moved on a short sea journey to Southsea, where it will take pride of place outside the D-Day Story museum. The vessel will be restored in time for the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings and will be open to visitors in 2020.

Professor Dominic Tweddle, director general of the NMRM said, "LCT 7074 is a unique time capsule of enormous importance to the history of D-Day and Operation Neptune. They were huge seagoing craft, built crudely and quickly, and few survived beyond 1945. Now, thanks to National Lottery players, we can pay our respects to her and ensure many thousands of visitors have a chance to go on board."

REMEMBERING CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES

THIS DECEMBER, THE NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM IS HOSTING EVENTS TO COMMEMORATE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON DURING WWI

For the festive season, families can discover how Christmas was celebrated during WWI between 15-31 December 2018. Events have free admission with limited places, and a responsible adult must accompany children.

'Festive First World War gift tins' (15 December) focuses on the history of the Princess Mary gift boxes that were distributed to all soldiers of the British Empire's armed forces on Christmas Day 1914. The tins were commissioned by George V's daughter and provided the troops with treats and a Christmas card. Visitors can make their own tin in this two-hour family craft session.

'Postcard performances: Sending Christmas greetings in the First World War' (22 & 29 December) is a series of family-friendly performances that tell the stories behind festive postcards sent by soldiers to their loved ones. Visitors can also meet a card designer with a display of original postcards.

In a similar vein, 'Embroidered Christmas cards' (22, 24, 29 & 31 December) is a family workshop for visitors to try their hand at textiles to re-create popular WWI silk postcards (see this issue's Artefact of War on page 98).

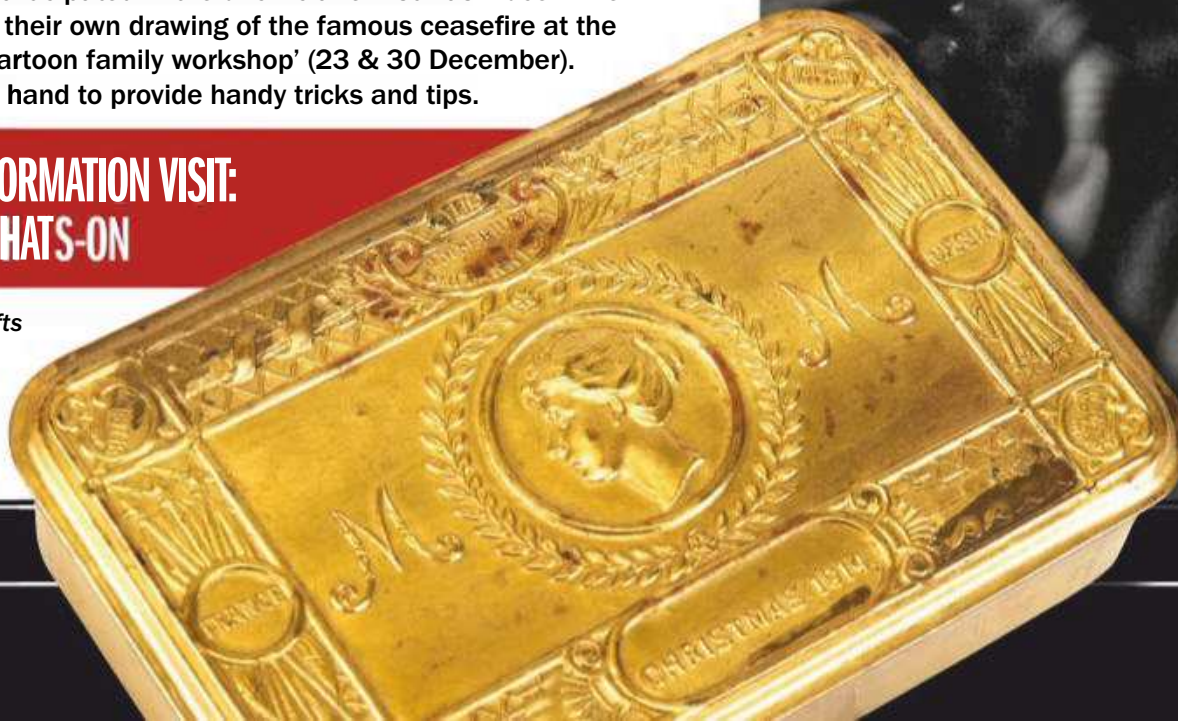
Trench satire was a popular theme among contemporary artists, especially Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, who drew popular cartoons in the trenches and participated in the unofficial Christmas Truce in 1914. Visitors can create their own drawing of the famous ceasefire at the 'Christmas Truce cartoon family workshop' (23 & 30 December). An artist will be on hand to provide handy tricks and tips.



Bruce Bairnsfather served in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and was appointed by the War Office to create cartoons for Allied forces

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
NAM.AC.UK/WHATS-ON**

£100,000 worth of gifts were distributed to British and Imperial troops in the Princess Mary Christmas tins



REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books & games

COMMANDS AND COLOURS THE GREAT WAR - CENTENARY EDITION

THE NEW RELEASE OF THIS HUGELY POPULAR WWI
TABLETOP GAME PUTS YOUR GENERALSHIP TO THE TEST

Publisher: PSC Games **Price:** £70.00

To commemorate the final centenary year of WWI, PSC Games has released a new version of its popular military board game *The Great War*. Inside the box you'll find 150 1/100th scale plastic infantry figures representing British and German forces, as well as card decks, dice and tokens for use during play. For this edition, PSC Games has updated the figures to come pre-assembled and ready for play, without the need for removal from plastic sprues.

For those unfamiliar with the Commands and Colours system from prolific game designer Richard Borg, the board is split into hexagonal shapes, which are used for measuring unit movement and combat during a player's turn. The battlefield is also separated into three flanks, corresponding to order cards that the players draw and keep in their hand. On their

turn, each player uses one command card from their hand, which dictates the number of units to be activated and in which section of the board – right flank, left flank or centre. Before getting into the thick of the fighting, first the battlefield must be set up, building trench networks, wire defences, landscape features, shell holes and more with tile pieces. The set-up process is long and can be slightly tedious – there are lots of figures to arrange before play can begin, and dozens of trench and terrain tiles and shell craters need to be painstakingly placed down in order.

However, this is where *The Great War* really displays some military history credentials. In the core box players can select from among 16 scenarios based on real campaigns from the Western Front. The battles of Loos, Vimy Ridge, several focused regions of the Somme and more can all be recreated on the board, each with its own arrangement of terrain and deployments reflecting the real battles. Despite a slight learning curve that may deter some,

there are dozens of campaign scenarios to play through in this core box alone, making for plenty of time for a novice to become a seasoned strategist. Special rules to account for artillery fire, on-the-ground tactics and fog of war all contribute to a satisfyingly immersive experience. There is plenty of appeal here for those casually interested in the period, as well as any confident armchair generals.

The Great War's latest expansion, 'The French Army', comes with a whole army of poilu, along with new rules and scenarios for Verdun and the Nivelle Offensive. Included are also new terrain tiles and a selection of new specialist units for all three nations, such as flamethrowers, marksmen, officers, forward observers and light machine gunners. These add even more depth to the core game, enabling a whole range of new tactics and combat options for players. **TW**

For more information and for the full range of Plastic Soldier Company games and more, please visit: theplasticsoldiercompany.co.uk

“IN THE CORE BOX PLAYERS CAN SELECT FROM AMONG 16 SCENARIOS BASED ON REAL CAMPAIGNS FROM THE WESTERN FRONT”



THE DECISIVE YEAR 1918

VAN EMDEN OFFERS AN EXTRAORDINARY COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS SURROUNDING THE EVENTS OF 1918

Author: Richard van Emden Publisher: Pen & Sword Price: £25.00

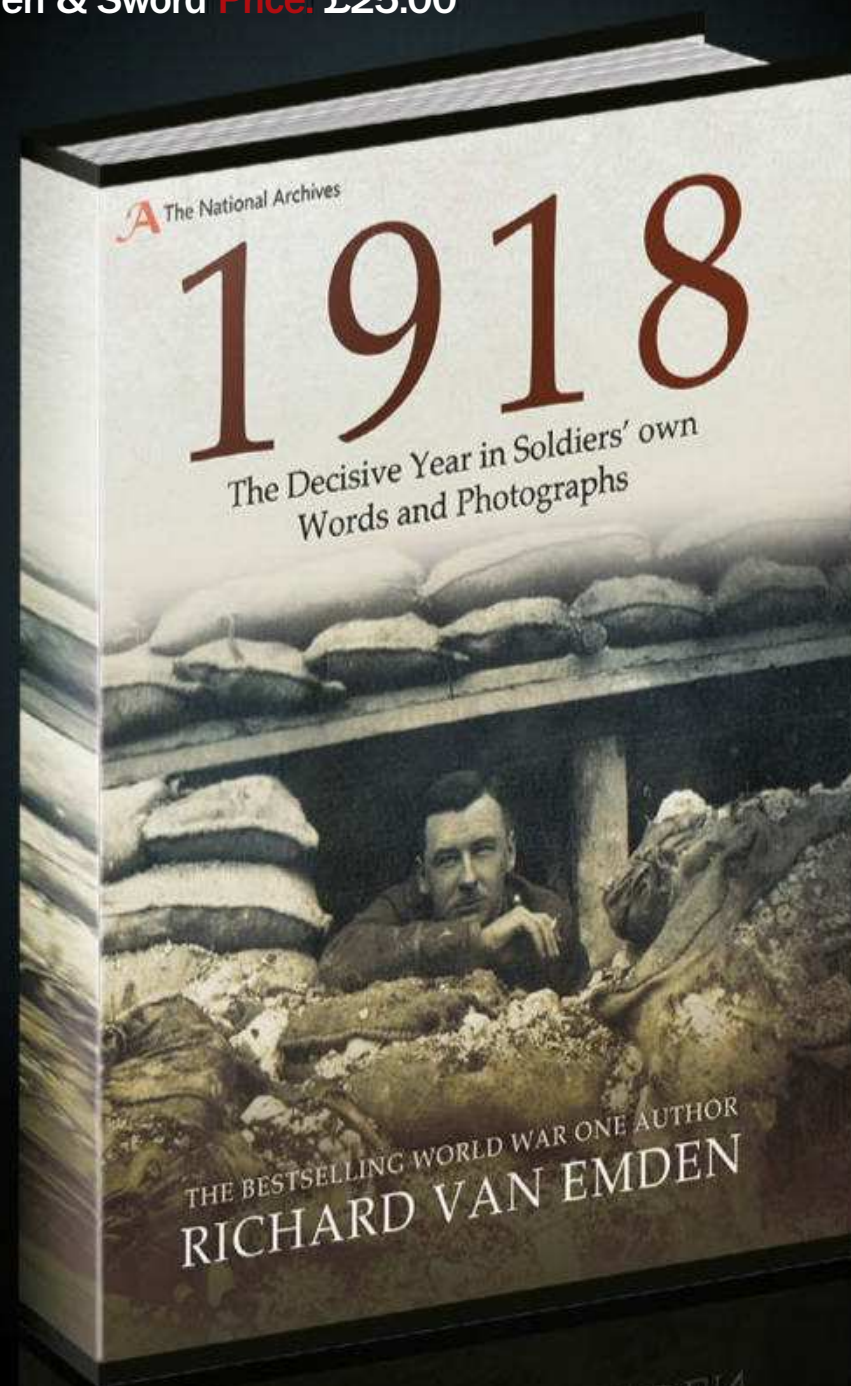
By the end of World War I in November 1918, the Allies and Central Powers had spent \$82.4 billion (roughly \$2 trillion in 2018 dollars) in a conflict that saw the mobilisation of nearly 70 million men. Around 8 million combatants were killed in actual fighting, with another 7 million permanently disabled and a further 15 million left with serious injuries. The costs of this war were unprecedented in casualties, money, the hundreds of thousands of homes destroyed, farms gutted, transport infrastructure blown up, livestock slaughtered, forests pulverised and vast tracts of land rendered unfit for farming because of unexploded shells and mines. All this, as it turned out, to serve as a dress-rehearsal for an even more terrible conflagration that was to ignite in 20 years' time.

Bookshelves are groaning with volumes by historians chronicling and analysing the terrible devastation that swept across Europe from 1914 to 1918. What Richard van Emden brings to this corpus of World War I narratives is an extraordinary collection of soldiers' photographs taken on their illegally held cameras. Through an exhaustive archive of memoirs, diaries and letters written by the men who fought, the author tells the story of the year 1918, when decisive victory was grasped from near-catastrophe.

As the author points out, this critical year is somehow glossed over, shunted into a siding, perhaps because the battles of significant movement, where great tracts of ground are gained by one side and then the other, are out of step with the Great War's established narrative of

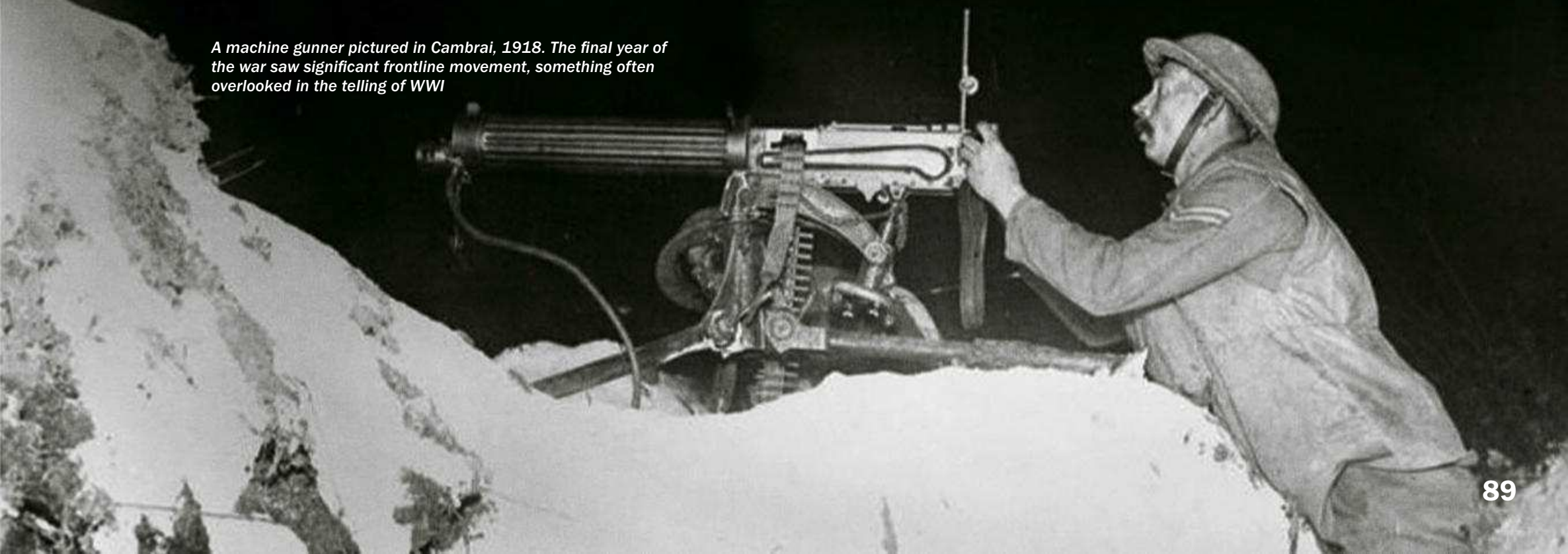
static trench warfare and lives lost for yards gained of muddy, blood-soaked ground. "Yet in so many ways," he says, "1918 can lay claim to be the most interesting year of all, because it had a little bit of everything and drama without parallel".

The Allies' task was to unblock the Western Front. This sequence of events is documented by photographs, despite the ban on cameras. The ruling was put in place in late 1914 to halt a trade in photographs between soldiers and newspapers – in other words, money in exchange for shots of frontline life and battle action. Van Emden has compiled a collection of photographs from both sides, devoting one chapter to images taken by German soldiers in order to reflect their perspective of the war. The images are throughout accompanied by first-hand accounts of life on the battlefield as experienced by the men who lived it. One of the most remarkable – and perhaps chilling – features of the book are the relaxed, smiling faces displayed in many of the images drawn from van Emden's archive of more than 5,000 privately taken and overwhelmingly unpublished photographs. They reveal an existence in the camps and trenches that at times could be exhilarating, too often terrifying, and occasionally, it would appear, even laughable. This brings to mind a remark made by George MacDonald Fraser, the creator of the *Flashman* novels, in one of the writer and former soldier's last public appearances. "War is terrible, devastating and tragic," he said, "but it can also be funny." JS



"THE IMAGES ARE THROUGHOUT ACCOMPANIED BY FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS OF LIFE ON THE BATTLEFIELD AS EXPERIENCED BY THE MEN WHO LIVED IT"

A machine gunner pictured in Cambrai, 1918. The final year of the war saw significant frontline movement, something often overlooked in the telling of WWI



SAS ITALIAN JOB

THE SECRET MISSION TO STORM A FORBIDDEN NAZI FORTRESS

A CAST OF BRILLIANT ECCENTRICS POPULATES THE STAGE OF DAMIEN LEWIS'S LATEST TRIUMPH

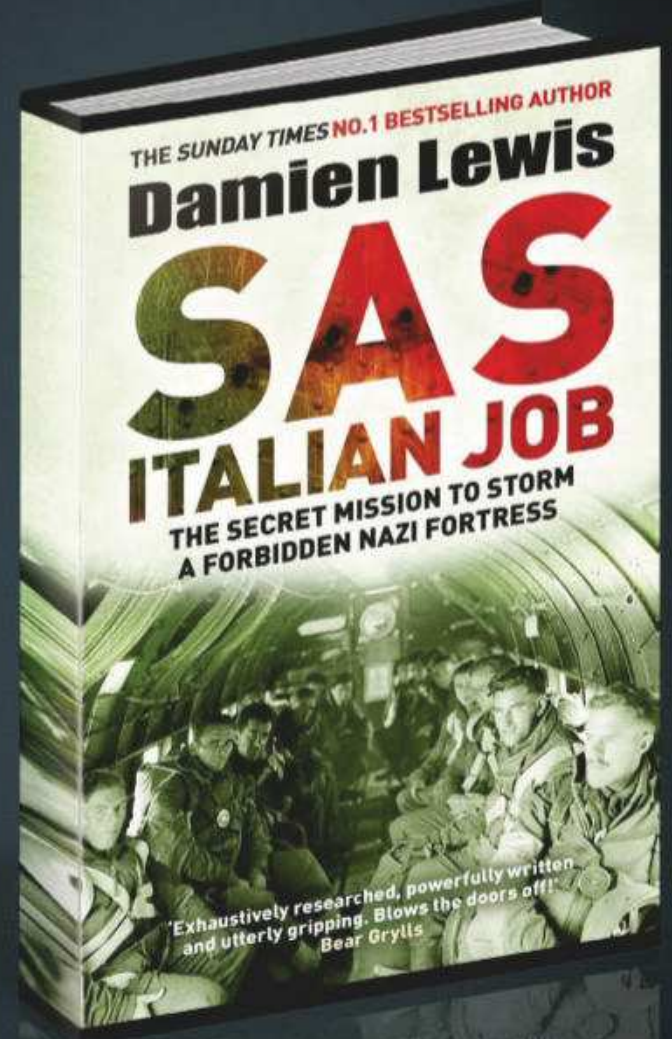
Author: Damien Lewis **Publisher:** Quercus **Price:** £20.00

Stories of the heroics of the SAS are nothing new, but each one that comes along brings with it fresh insight and new perspectives, especially those that deal with previously neglected missions. Damien Lewis has researched a joint SAS-SOE (Special Operations Executive) mission to attack the German army HQ in northern Italy during World War II, telling a story that will be new to most, and doing so at a cracking pace.

The mission was daring, as the fortress housing the HQ was formidable, and it would take special men to carry it out. This is where two of the most colourful characters to grace the pages of military history enter: SOE agent

Mike 'Wild Man' Lees and SAS commander Roy Farran. Alongside other larger-than-life figures, including the giant William McClelland and the kilted David 'The Mad Piper' Kilpatrick, Lewis's story unfolds like a work of fiction. In fact, the characters tumble one after another in an apparent competition to be more reckless and eccentric than the last. Notable in this regard is Major Charles Macintosh, a New Zealander in the SOE who once drove into action with a white rabbit called 'Poggibonsi' sitting on the machine gun of his armoured car.

Lewis has accessed declassified files and undertaken personal interviews to piece together



a scarcely credible story that is very much in keeping with his earlier works. If you like your non-fiction to read like a well-crafted novel, this book is for you. **DS**

“IF YOU LIKE YOUR NON-FICTION TO READ LIKE A WELL-CRAFTED NOVEL, THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU”

XY&Z

IN BRITAIN THE BREAKING OF ENIGMA IS SYNONYMOUS WITH ALAN TURING AND THE WORK AT BLETCHLEY PARK, BUT THIS NEW STUDY REVEALS A CRUCIAL BUT FORGOTTEN SIDE TO THE STORY

Author: Dermot Turing **Publisher:** The History Press **Price:** £20.00

Cracking the German Enigma is estimated to have shortened World War II by as much as two years, yet prior to May 1940 Britain's code-breakers had made no headway against the military Enigma machine. So, how was it they suddenly were able to make such swift progress?

This question introduces *X, Y & Z*, the newly published book by Dermot Turing, nephew of the world-renowned code-breaker Alan Turing. The answer is that a piece of the story, as it is generally told in Britain, is missing. The race to break Enigma had in fact started many years earlier, in Poland, a country at the forefront of cryptology since the 1920s.

Thoroughly researched and written in a way that makes for a truly exhilarating,

page-turning read, Turing's book sets out to complete the picture. Above all, it tells the story of a uniquely talented and skilled group of very different individuals that came together at one pivotal moment in history. Among them was the mathematician and cryptologist Marian Rejewski, who made the first crucial Enigma breakthrough in 1932. As World War II was about to erupt in 1939, Rejewski, together with fellow mathematicians Jerzy Rózycki and Henryk Zygalski, revealed how to break Enigma during a secret intelligence collaboration between France ('X'), Britain ('Y') and Poland ('Z').

It was an act of trust that would in time make Allied success possible. **MB**



INDIA, EMPIRE, AND FIRST WORLD WAR CULTURE

SANTANU DAS THOROUGHLY EXPLORES THE CULTURE OF INDIAN SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT DURING WORLD WAR I

Author: Santanu Das **Publisher:** Cambridge University Press **Price:** £19.99 (paperback)

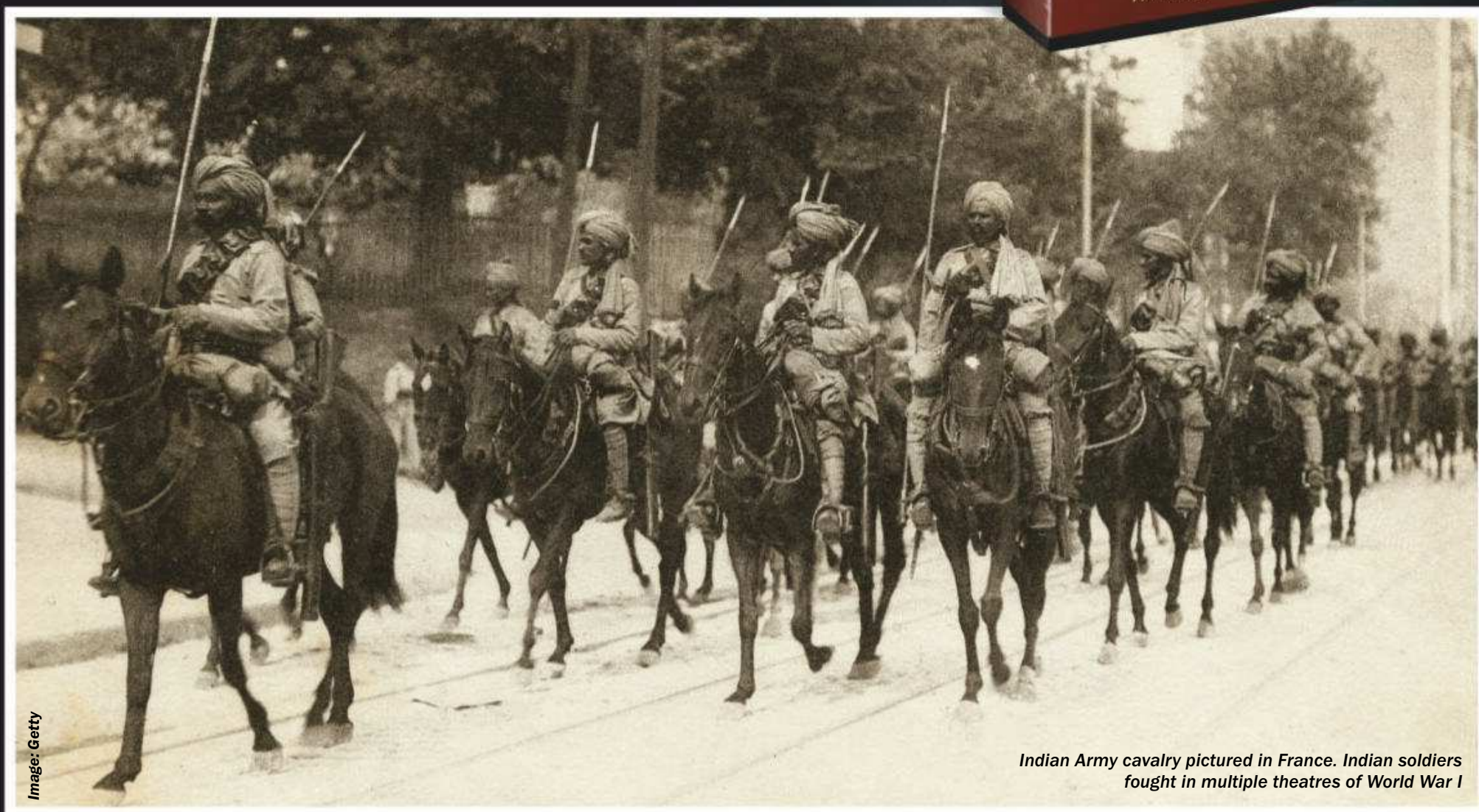
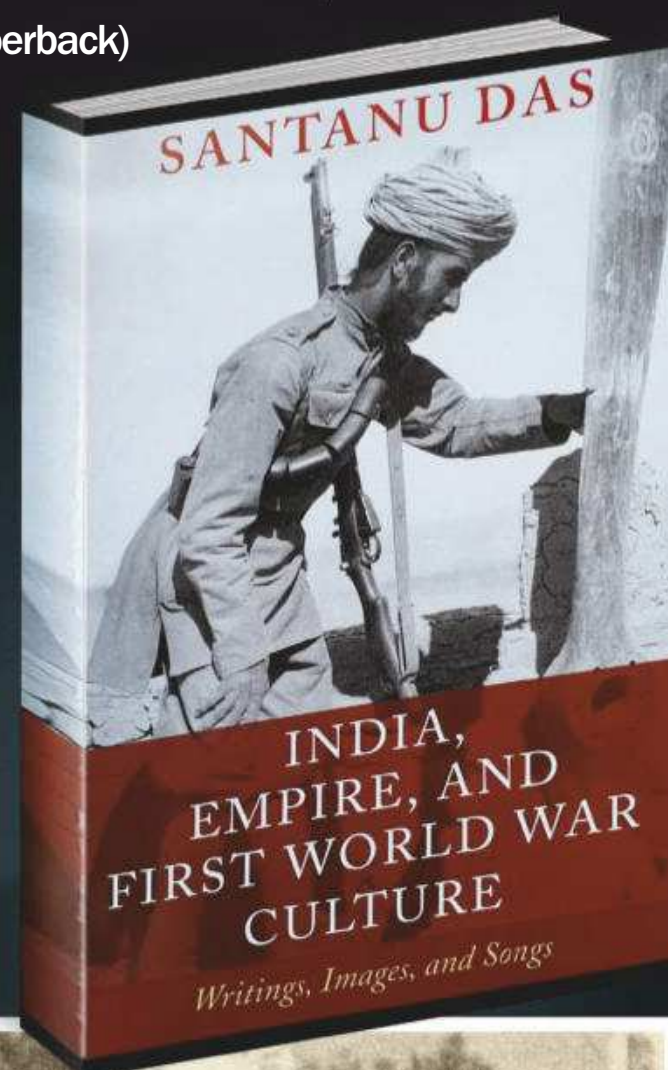
With the centenary of World War I, a plethora of new books have been published on just about every aspect of the conflict, from the Battle of Liège to the Armistice and beyond. Some merely go over old ground, retelling well-worn stories, while others manage to present fresh evidence that make us look at those same stories in a new light. A few examine aspects of the war that are often overlooked or sadly understudied. It is, perhaps, into this latter category that *India, Empire, And First World War Culture: Writings, Images, And Songs* by Santanu Das thankfully falls.

Das, a professor at King's College London, is well-placed to write such a study. He has already written a number of books on World War I, including titles that focus on the Indian Army. In his latest book, he offers the reader a truly

exceptional study of the experiences of Indian troops in Europe, Mesopotamia and elsewhere. Das does this through personal letters, diaries, interviews, poetry, imagery, folksongs and just about every source of information left to us by the Indian soldiers themselves. It is not merely a study of the combat experience of sepoys – rather it dives deep into their fascinating wartime culture.

It is said that Das took ten years to research and write this book, and it shows. It is without doubt meticulously researched and well written. Although an academic text, being published by Cambridge University Press, it will nevertheless greatly appeal to anyone with an interest in the Indian Army during World War I. It is a very welcome addition to the current 1914-18 literature on offer. **MS**

“IT IS SAID THAT DAS TOOK TEN YEARS TO RESEARCH AND WRITE THIS BOOK, AND IT SHOWS. IT IS WITHOUT DOUBT METICULOUSLY RESEARCHED AND WELL WRITTEN”



Indian Army cavalry pictured in France. Indian soldiers fought in multiple theatres of World War I

5 BEST BOOKS ON

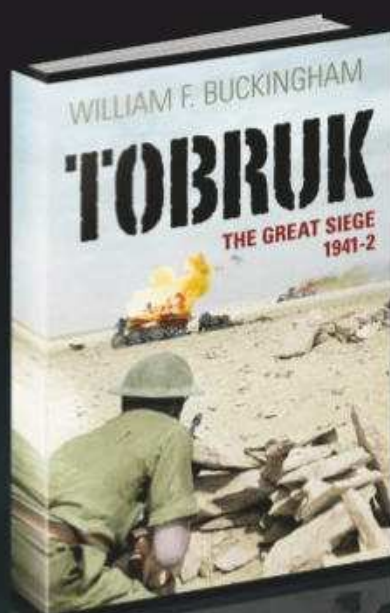
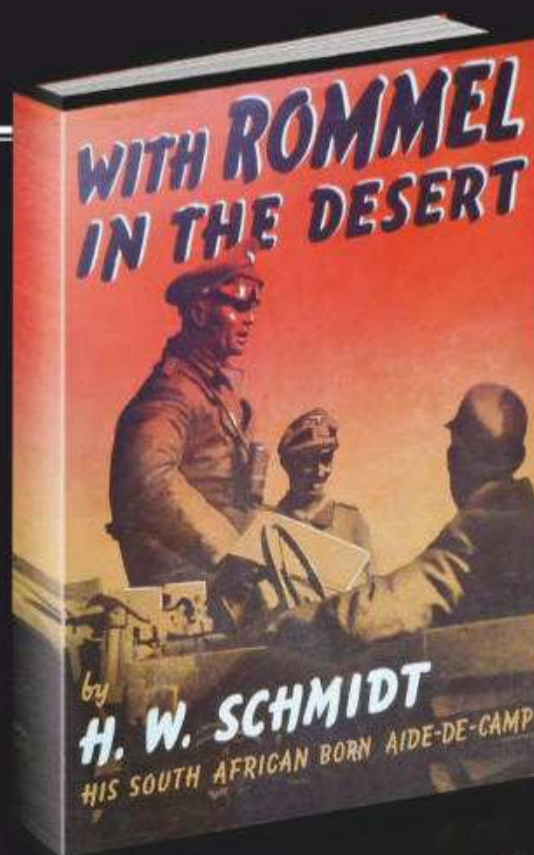
THE 1941 SIEGE OF TOBRUK

THE EPIC STAND OF BRITISH AND COMMONWEALTH FORCES AT TOBRUK THROTTLED THE OFFENSIVE OF ERWIN ROMMEL AND THE AFRIKA KORPS

With Rommel In The Desert
H.W. Schmidt

Originally published in 1951, the book highlights Erwin Rommel's campaigns in the North African desert, offering rare insights from the author, his South African-born aide-de-camp. The book includes lengthy treatment of the 1941 siege of Tobruk, placing the importance of the port city in context with an excellent view of the siege from the Axis perspective.

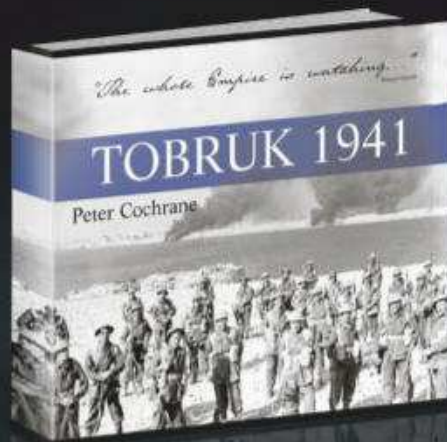
“THE BOOK HIGHLIGHTS GENERAL ROMMEL’S CAMPAIGNS IN THE NORTH AFRICAN DESERT, OFFERING RARE INSIGHTS FROM THE AUTHOR, HIS SOUTH AFRICAN-BORN AIDE-DE-CAMP”



**Tobruk:
The Great Siege
1941-2**

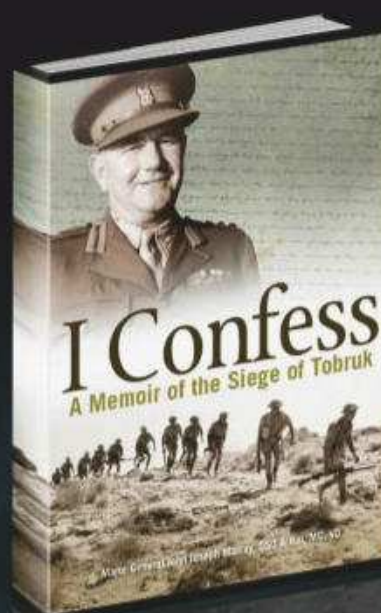
William F. Buckingham

The author utilises recollections from veterans of the longest siege in British military history to bring depth to this account of the epic 241-day defence. Skilfully balanced with the perspective of the Axis and a clear explanation of the port city's strategic importance, this book is perhaps the best available comprehensive reference to the event.



**Tobruk
1941**
*Peter
Cochrane*

Published in 2007, this book describes the trials of the Australian defenders of Tobruk during the 1941 siege. It details their heroism and steadfastness under continuous Axis fire, along with the privations – shortages of food, water and ammunition as well as the plague of flies and other pests. Fine illustrations add to the depth of the work.



**I Confess:
A Memoir Of The Siege
Of Tobruk**
John Joseph Murray

Major General John Joseph Murray commanded the 20th Australian Brigade during the siege of Tobruk, and this personal memoir of the desperate fight was written in the spring of 1945 as World War II neared its end. Murray combines elements of humour, pathos and heroism to tell the story of his courageous command during the battle.



**The Longest Siege:
Tobruk, The Battle That
Saved North Africa**
Robert Lyman

According to the author, it was an uneven match as 24,000 troops of the Britain and the Commonwealth, primarily the Australian 9th and British 70th Divisions, stood up to Rommel's Afrika Korps and eventually compelled Axis forces to withdraw from Cyrenaica. The reader is carried through the desperate siege to the triumphant link-up with the advancing Eighth Army.

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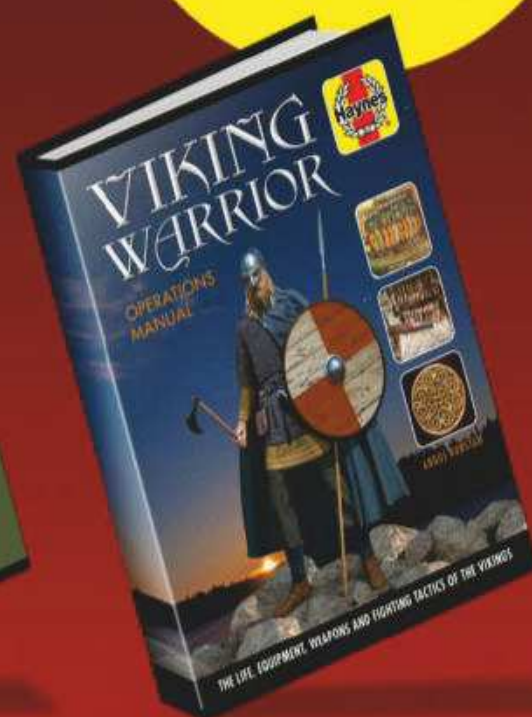
Haynes is a name recognised all around the world, famous for the meticulously technical dissections in the Owners' Workshop Manuals, which strip down and explain the working parts of classic vehicles, piece by piece. Over the past few years the publisher has applied this unique approach and illustrative style to some of the iconic machines from military history and beyond.

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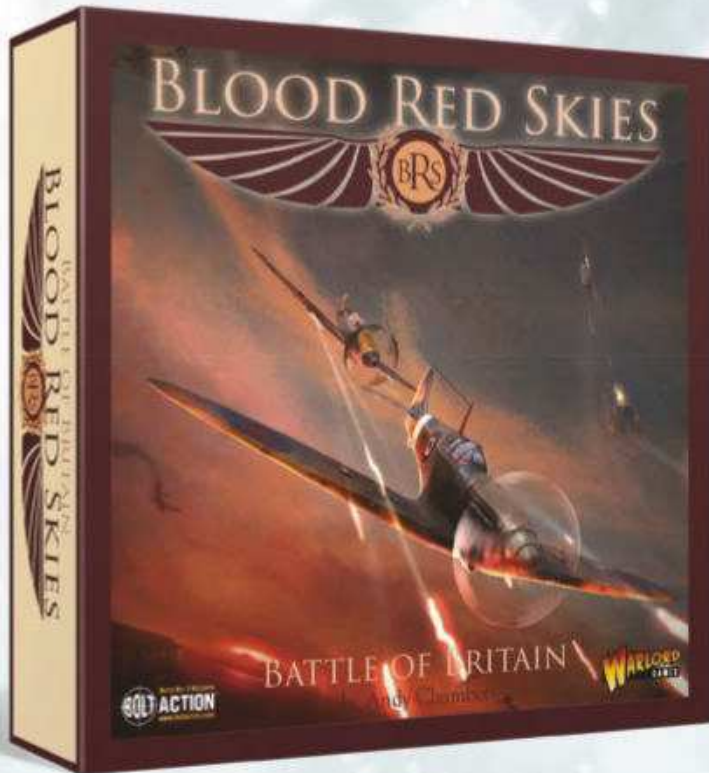
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CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

Take a look at this fantastic range of gift inspirations, perfect for yourself or the military history buff in your life



BLOOD RED SKIES

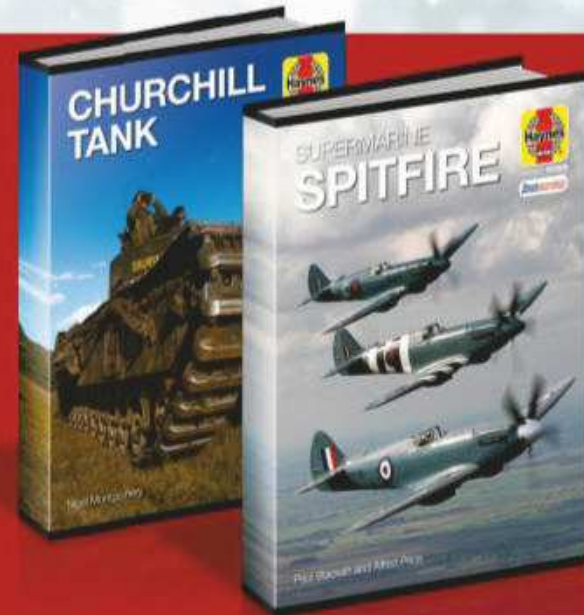
TAKE TO THE CLOUDS OVER WWII IN THIS NEW DOG-FIGHTING TABLETOP GAME

£40 warlordgames.com

Blood Red Skies is a tabletop miniatures game where you command formations of World War II fighter aircraft in battle. Written by renowned games designer Andy Chambers, the action in the game is fast-paced – with six or more planes per side, a thrilling dogfight can be fought in 45 minutes or less.

Packed with everything you need to play, the Blood Red Skies starter set focuses on the Battle of Britain, with the RAF and Luftwaffe vying for control of the skies over Britain in 1940.

Additional expansion sets introduce more 1:200 scale aircraft types such as the Hawker Hurricane, P-51 Mustang and the Mitsubishi Zero, among others, which introduces more national air forces as well as deadly air aces such as Douglas Bader, Adolf Galland and Lidya Litvyak.



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Other Haynes Icon titles include the Tornado steam engine, Concorde and RMS Titanic.

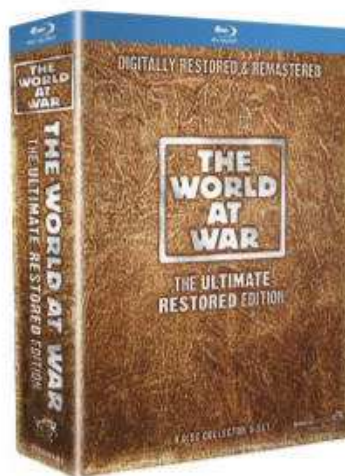
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Originally aired in 1973 and narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier, the series went on to win a BAFTA and Broadcasting Press Guild award. This new, re-mastered version of *The World At War* has been fully restored, and the audio enhanced with modern techniques.



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ARMISTICE 1918 WATCH

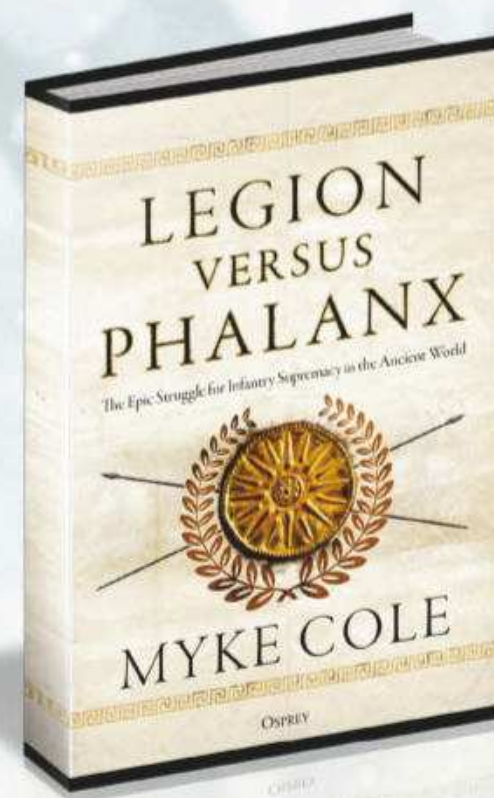
THE OFFICIAL WATCHMAKER FOR THE BRITISH ARMED FORCES HAS CREATED THIS SPECIAL DESIGN TO COMMEMORATE THE 1918 CENTENARY
£385 colandmacarthur.com

In tribute to the centenary of the end of WWI, renowned watchmaker Col&MacArthur, official timepiece supplier to the British Armed Forces, has created a special, limited edition design, complete with intricate commemorative details. For instance, George Ellison's initials – the final British soldier to be killed during the war – are placed halfway between the 9 and 10 on the watch face, symbolising 9.30 when he died. Also, in place of the number 11 sits a delicate poppy to denote the 11th hour of the Armistice, and the number 5 is coloured red for the hour the document was signed. Only 1,918 of these watches were ever made – another deliberate reference. There is even an engraving of up to 60 characters of your choice available to fully personalise the piece.

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Commemorating the centenary of the 1918 Armistice, the Royal Mint has produced this beautifully designed £5 coin, which is the only official UK Remembrance coin. These £5 sets also come with a fold-out wallet detailing the history and tradition of the Armistice commemorations on 11 November. The Royal Mint brings out a different commemorative coin each year, each with a new design from its workshop. A donation from each coin sale is also made to the Imperial War Museums.



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MYKE COLE'S BOOK EXPLORES THE DEFINING CLASH OF ANCIENT MILITARY FORMATIONS
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From the time of Ancient Sumeria, the heavy infantry phalanx dominated the battlefield. Armed with spears or pikes, standing shoulder to shoulder with shields interlocking, the men of the phalanx presented an impenetrable wall of wood and metal to the enemy. Until, that is, the Roman legion emerged to challenge them as masters of infantry battle.

Covering the period in which the legion and phalanx clashed (280–168 BCE), Myke Cole delves into their tactics, arms and equipment, organisation and deployment. Exploring six key battles, he shows how and why the Roman legion, with its flexible organisation, versatile tactics and iron discipline, came to eclipse the hitherto untouchable phalanx and dominate the ancient battlefield.

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WWI POSTCARDS

These beautiful silk cards were a common souvenir for British soldiers to send home from the Western Front



This Christmas postcard depicts a bell with the flags of the United States and Great Britain. It is probable that this card was sent in December 1917, the USA's only fighting Christmas during WWI

Above, top: The hand-embroidered silk was glued into an embossed surrounding frame. These cards were so delicate that they were usually sent within written letters

Above: Many postcards depicted Allied solidarity. This example includes the flags of (left to right) Belgium, Britain, France, Russia and Italy. The enclosed pre-printed card also depicts Japan

For the families of soldiers serving during World War I, letters and postcards were the only method of communication with their loved ones on the frontline. For British troops, embroidered silk postcards became extremely popular.

The postcards were made by unemployed French and Belgian civilians in domestic houses during the war. Many of the manufacturers would have been refugees, and designs were embroidered on silk before they were sent to Paris for cutting up, assembly and distribution. Some contained a secret pocket for inserting a tiny, pre-printed card, and the designs were highly varied in bright colours. Themes could be patriotic or sentimental, and flags, flowers, birds and butterfly wings featured strongly.

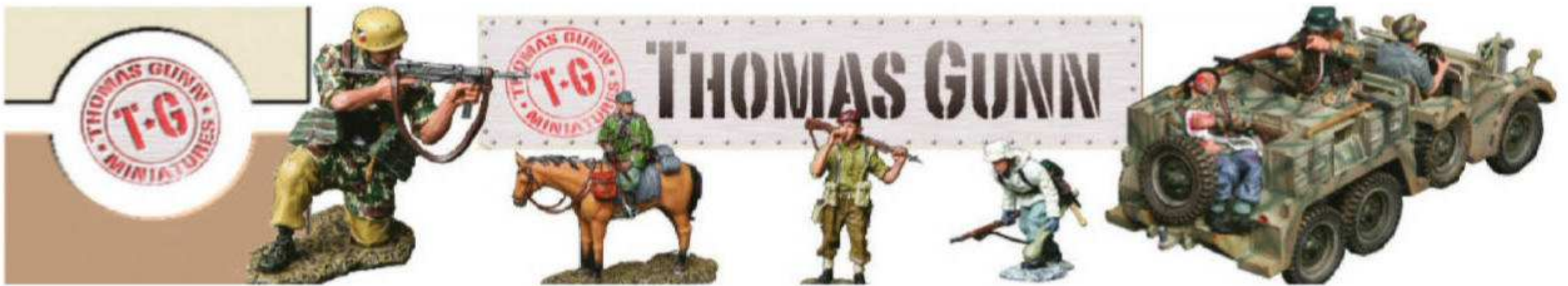
“MANY OF THE MANUFACTURERS WOULD HAVE BEEN REFUGEES, AND DESIGNS WERE EMBROIDERED ON SILK BEFORE THEY WERE SENT TO PARIS FOR CUTTING UP, ASSEMBLY AND DISTRIBUTION”

Because of their intricate production, the postcards were a significant investment for soldiers to send home as a thoughtful keepsake. These pictured examples were posted by a British soldier called John Petch. Known to everyone as 'Jack', Petch frequently sent embroidered cards home to relatives in Coventry, although he could not reveal his rank, regiment or location due to strict censorship.

However, one of the cards touchingly demonstrates that although he was presumably

fighting for his life on the Western Front, Petch was still thinking of his family. In one card, posted at an unknown date, Petch hurriedly wrote to his in-laws Alfred and Edith Prescott, "To Alf and Ede from Jack wishing you both the best of luck and health. I am sorry I have not time to write a letter as we are going in the trenches today but still I will drop you a few lines as soon as I get the chance. All this time from, Jack." Happily, Petch survived the war and returned home.





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TIME TO REMEMBER



The First World War began for the British on 4 August 1914 when the Germans invaded Belgium. The magnitude of the losses suffered in the 1,560 days that followed will stay with us forever. By the time the Armistice agreement was signed on 11 November 1918 at 5am, nearly one million soldiers from the British Empire had fallen. To mark the centenary of Armistice Day, Col&MacArthur has designed this stunning limited edition Armistice 1918 watch. Behind its sleek styling and Swiss quartz movement, the watch encapsulates the historical events that ended the Great War.



To symbolise the time the Armistice was signed, the number 5 on the watch is coloured red. Alongside it is printed N 2419D, the number of the wagon in which the end of the war was formally agreed.

Although the Armistice was signed at 5am, soldiers kept fighting for six more hours. The last to fall was Private George Edwin Ellison of the Royal Irish Lancers. His initials appear at 09h30 on the watch, the time that he died.



Thanks to the poem "In Flanders Fields", the poppy became a prominent Remembrance Day symbol and replaces the 11 on the watch, the time the war ended, alongside the date of the Armistice.

For a unique touch, the watch can also be engraved on the back to pay tribute to an ancestor, creating a treasured family heirloom, or in remembrance of a heroic soldier, doctor or nurse who played a part in the war.



WATCHMAKERS OF DISTINCTION

Col&MacArthur is a watchmaking company created by Iain Wood, a former Scots Guard, and his associate Sebastien Colen. The company is built on a common passion for horology and founding values of pride, heritage and commemoration, something that's helped them become official watch supplier for the Royal Guards of Buckingham Palace and the British Army.

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